

Some People Are Born Criminals by agrajag

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Genre: Alcohol, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Alternate Universe - No Pennywise (IT), Anal Sex, Arson, Bisexual Stanley Uris, Blood and Violence, Bottom Bill Denbrough, Emetophobia, F/M, Family Issues, Gay Richie Tozier, Gen, Hand Jobs, Hate Crimes, Homelessness, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Kidnapping, M/M, Marijuana, Minor Character Death, POV Alternating, Richie Tozier Has ADHD, Self-Esteem Issues, Semi-Public Sex, Temporary Character Death, Time Travel

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Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Georgie Denbrough, Henry Bowers, Mike Hanlon, Original Characters, Patricia Blum Uris, Richie Tozier, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris

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Summary:

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Listening to the probation worker give what he probably thought was an empowering speech.

"This is it. It's your chance to do something. Give something back. You can help people. You can really make a difference to people's lives. It's what

community service is all about. There's people out there that think you're scum. This is your chance to prove them wrong."

One of the other parolees, the one with the glasses that took up half his face, raised his hand. The probation worker looked confused but pointed to him.

"Yeah, but what if they're right?" the man asked. "No offense, but I'm thinking some people are born criminals."

1. Episode One

Author's Note:

this is a misfits AU so there's a bunch of dialogue that's lifted right from the first episode

it also follows it very closely plot wise but you don't have to watch the show to enjoy this it's not a crossover in any way

this was 50% inspired by [this post](#) i kept seeing and 50% inspired by the fact that me and a friend just finished rewatching misfits

i'm not sure how far i'm going to go with this but there will most likely be more of this nonsense lol

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"Yeah, but what if they're right?" the man asked. "No offense, but I'm thinking some people are born criminals."

He looked over to the man with curly hair and sneered at him. Curly

Hair looked like he was about to retaliate, but his phone rang, and he answered it instead. The probation worker gave him a look and tried to continue on with his speech.

"It doesn't matter what you've done in the past. What matters... Can you get off the phone?"

"I thought you had finished," Curly Hair said.

"Do you see my lips still moving?"

"But you could have been yawning," Big Glasses suggested. "Or chewing or..."

"It's my probation worker," Curly Hair said, back on his phone. "Oh, ew. No. Don't be gross."

"This isn't going to work for me," Short Guy said.

God, Eddie couldn't take much more of this.

"Hey, what makes you think that you're better than us?" he asked.

"What is that?" Big Glasses asked, cutting off whatever Short Guy was about to say. "Was that a squeak? Are we supposed to understand that?"

At this point, all of them were talking over each other and Eddie couldn't make out a word. He could see the probation worker slowly losing what little he had left of his patience. He eventually snapped at them and shoved buckets filled with white paint at them.

"See those benches? Paint."

Eddie would have taken the bench farthest way from the rest of the group but Quiet Guy took that. With a sigh, Eddie took the next one and hoped that the others wouldn't bother him. He had no such luck when Big Glasses came over and started painting the front of Eddie's bench while he worked on the back.

"I'm sorry if I upset you earlier," he said eventually, catching Eddie off guard.

"It's alright, I guess." He refused to look up at the guy, partly because *of course* he was good looking and Eddie refused to get a crush on someone as annoying as he was, but mostly because he wished he would leave him alone. He just wanted to put in his hours and then forget that it had ever happened.

"Soooooooo, I'm Richie. What's your name?"

"Eddie."

"So, Eds, what are you in for?"

Eddie's hand froze for a moment before he dipped his brush back in the bucket and resumed painting.

"I got into a fight," he said quietly. "There was this guy. I don't really want to talk about it. What about you?"

"Oh me?" Richie smiled deviously, like that was what he had been hoping for since he had started the conversation. Eddie quickly glanced back at the wood he was painting. "I got done for eating some penny candy."

"Okay. Don't be serious, then."

"What about you Quiet Guy?" Richie continued, turning to face the other antisocial one of their group. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you look like a pantie sniffer."

"I am not a pantie sniffer," Quiet Guy said. "And my name is Ben."

"Okay, geez. No need to get your panties in a twist," Richie said, holding his hands out in a 'I surrender' pose. His brush dripped white paint down the side of his orange jumpsuit, although it probably didn't matter. Now that he was turned a bit, Eddie could see he had already drawn on the back in Sharpie. "I'm just trying to get to know everyone. What about the rest of you guys?"

The one girl of their group was sitting on the steps, smoking a cigarette. Surprisingly, she was the first to answer Richie.

"I'm Bev. And I beat the shit out of my father."

"Oh wow, now that's what I'm talking about," Richie said with awe. "Very nice."

That seemed to ease the tension between all of them. Richie obviously was a bit of a class clown, but it did seem he was simply interested in getting to know everyone. Try to make the work go by faster. The rest of the group introduced themselves, Curly Hair being Stan, Short Guy being Bill, and the last of their group being Mike. Stan had vandalized his father's synagogue for undisclosed reasons, Mike had also gotten into a fight with some racist assholes, and Bill had broken into a police station.

"I'm sorry, you did what?" Richie asked, his voice raising high enough that Eddie was sure dogs could hear him.

"Yeah, I was looking for some information about my brother," Bill explained. "He went missing last year, and they aren't doing anything about it. The cop supposedly on the case knows me, so thankfully I got away 'easy' as they put it."

"Well, sorry Bev, but I think Bill here is now the most bad ass out of us losers."

"I don't think I can even be mad about that," Bev said. She had finished her second cigarette at this point and finally rejoined them in painting. "That is pretty bad ass."

"Not *that* bad ass. I didn't find anything before I was caught. Which was pretty quickly."

The seven of them continued to talk as they continued painting. It was starting to get overcast, but it didn't look like it was going to rain any time soon, so they kept at it. At one point, the probation worker came out to check on them and congratulated them on actually

getting work done. Eddie didn't like his sarcastic tone. He knew, though, that saying anything wasn't going to help his situation and he kept it to himself. Maybe he should have because as the sky started to open and lightning flashed across the sky, Ben took out his phone to film it. The probation worker didn't like this, grabbed his phone, and put it in his pocket. Richie started yelling at him while the rest of the group stood their ground, waiting with baited breath to see what happened. They had been so focused that none of them saw the giant hail falling toward them.

It landed right behind Richie and he screamed as he jumped nearly a foot into the air.

"Holy shit. What the hell was that?"

"I think that was hail," Mike said. "But it's like the size of a car!"

"Guys, there's more coming!" Bev said, pointing for the sky. "Watch out!"

Eddie and Ben ran the few feet toward the stairs just as another piece of hail slammed into the benches they had just finished painting.

"What the fuck?" Richie screamed right into Eddie's ear. He went to cup his hand around it, like that would help, but realized that Richie was holding it in a death grip and he couldn't. "What the fuck is happening?"

"Guys, we have to get inside!" Bill shouted as several pieces of hail fell into the river, splashing them all.

They all went running to the community center, the probation worker bringing up the rear. Bill and Mike reached the door first, desperately trying to pull it open, but it was locked.

"What the fuck?" Stan asked. "Did you fucking lock it?"

"Unlock the door!" Bev yelled.

"Do not speak to me like that," the probation worker said.

God, how could he sound so calm? They were going to die if they stayed out here. He was taking his time going through the key ring, searching for the one to the front door, and Eddie didn't care anymore that Richie was holding onto him for dear life. In fact, he slipped his hand down and threaded his fingers through Richie's. If he was going to die, he wanted to at least hold a cute guy's hand. It wasn't fair he was here and hadn't even held someone's hand.

And then ---

--- there was a flash of light.

Eddie came too several feet from where he had been standing. He was no longer right next to Richie. In fact, it looked as if all of them had been thrown back toward the railing where this shitty fucking day had begun. And, oh God, he was in incredible pain. "What just happened?" he asked.

"I think we got struck by lightning," Ben said.

"God, I feel really weird," Richie said. He stood up quickly, leaned on the railing, and threw up into the river. "Okay. Now I feel a *little* bit better."

"You're so fucking disgusting," Stan said and then collapsed right back onto the ground.

"Hey, are *you* alright?" Mike asked the probation worker.

He was looking dazed, watching the seven of them with a glazed look in his eye.

"Assholes," he muttered and then quickly shook his head. "So everyone is alright?"

"Yeah, no thanks to you," Bev said.

Huh. Had her hair been *that* red the whole day?

"Okay, I think we can call that a day."

Like any of them were going to stay after that.

They all made their way to the locker room, once the probation worker *finally* found the key, and started changing into their clothes. Eddie was still in some pain, so he took his time, leaving him and Richie the last two there. Richie seemed to literally be stalling, waiting for Eddie, and he tried to not get his hopes up as to what that could mean.

'God, he's too fucking cute, it should be illegal.'

What was that? Maybe he *should* get his hopes up?

No, he probably misheard him. Best to make sure before he made a fool of himself.

"Sorry. Didn't quite catch that. What did you say?"

Richie stared at him as if he'd grown another head.

"I didn't say anything."

"Oh, sorry," Eddie said as he blushed. "I thought you did."

'Like seriously, someone that neurotic shouldn't be that cute.'

"What the fuck Richie?" Eddie asked as he turned around. He had moved too fast and his shoulder hurt. "Stop muttering shit under your breath."

"I didn't mutter anything asshole," Richie retorted. He slammed his locker door shut and started walking away. "Whatever. I'm out of here."

"Fine! I don't want anything to do with an immature dickhead anyway," Eddie yelled after him.

See? What had he said? He didn't need someone annoying like that in

his life. He would rather never kiss a boy than kiss Richie.

Though he did want to kiss a boy eventually. It felt like bull shit that he was stuck doing community service for the fight with Henry Bowers, who had started it all because he thought Eddie was gay. Which, duh, he was. That was besides the point. He had only defended himself and somehow he ended up here while Henry got off scotch free because his dad was a cop. The least the universe could do was send a cute boy his way for his troubles. If he was here because he was gay, he should be as gay as he possibly could.

Instead of going on a date, though, he went straight home like he did every night. His mother fussed over him as soon as he was through the door, asking if he was alright. Did he get wet in that rain storm earlier? Were the other parolees nice to him? They didn't have him doing anything too labor intensive, did they?

He tried to weasel his way out of the conversation. A 'yes Mom' here. A 'no Mom' there. She frowned at him and crossed his arms.

'He's just like his father. Why can't he listen to me?'

Eddie froze. She *never* mentioned his father. He must have came off as too annoyed. He was about to apologize when it suddenly hit him... he hadn't seen her mouth move.

"Everything's alright, Mom. I just think I need to lie down."

'I knew that this was going to be too much for my Eddie bear.'

Eddie closed his bedroom door, leaned against it, and slid down to the floor. He cradled his head in his hands and let out a sigh.

"I think I'm going crazy," he said to himself because he couldn't simply think it. There were all these other voices in his head. Because... "I can hear people's thoughts. I can, can't I?"

Eddie groaned as his alarm woke him from a rather nice dream about a guy, who was totally not Richie, kissing him. Why had he set it for so early?

Oh. Right. Community service.

He reluctantly pulled himself out of bed and got dressed as fast as he could. He always wanted to get out of the house under normal circumstances, but he definitely wanted to as soon as possible that day. He didn't think he could stand hearing what his mother *really* thought of him. He had known for awhile that she was over bearing in an attempt to control him and not because he had any of the multiple illnesses she insisted he had. That was bad enough. He didn't want to know what else was going on in that head of hers. So once he was dressed, he simply grabbed a granola bar from the kitchen, gave her a quick kiss goodbye, and went running out the door. He may have ended up being a little early for his community service but he didn't care. It beat the alternative.

Surprisingly, he wasn't the first one to arrive. Richie was also there, playing Foosball by himself. Eddie tried to sneak past him and get to the locker room, but unfortunately he wasn't that lucky.

br > "Hey, Eds. Wait up a sec!" Richie abandoned the game, catching up to Eddie, and slinging his arm around his shoulder. "Hey, I'm glad I caught you before the rest of the losers got here. I wanted to say sorry for yesterday."

"What part of yesterday?" Eddie asked. He picked up Richie's arm and pushed it off of him. "You were a little shit for most of the day."

"Ouch, Eds. Way to hurt my delicate sensibilities." Richie clutched his heart and fell to the ground. Eddie had to bite his tongue so he didn't chastise him for how dirty it most likely was. Thankfully he stood back up before Eddie lost his nerve. "I'm talking about in the locker room. I really do mean it. There was no reason to flip out on you. We're all a little crazy."

"I'm not crazy," Eddie said, although he didn't believe it.

He had reached his locker at that point and tried to focus on changing instead of the nitwit following him around.

'Oh Jesus, look away. Look away. Do not stare at his ass. No matter how perky of an ass it is.'

God, Eddie wanted to smash his head into the door of his locker. Maybe then he'd knock Richie's thoughts out of his head. Or better yet, get amnesia and forget any of this had ever happened.

The other five started to show up and thankfully drowned out anything Richie was thinking. Eddie decided it would be best if he just put in his headphones while they were working and try to ignore the whole thing. He queued up something motivating and told them he'd meet them outside. As he was leaving, he did a double take and counted heads. Huh, was one of them missing? He had been sure everyone had arrived, but honestly, he had more than enough on his mind than to worry about that. He hit play and went out to the front of the community center where the probation worker had left buckets filled with water and soap for them so they could clean some graffiti that had appeared over night. Eddie started scrubbing and the rest of the losers slowly joined him.

As the morning went on, things seemed to be quiet enough, and Eddie took his headphones out to see if he'd catch anymore of Richie's annoying thoughts. It seemed he was in the clear, so he put his phone away and even joined Bill and Mike's conversation. They were just starting to see an improvement, the paint starting to disappear from the wall, when Ben timidly spoke up.

"Hey, has anyone, uh, noticed anything weird after the storm?"

"Yeah," Richie said, and Eddie was afraid he was going to say something about what had happened in the locker room after everyone had left. "I have this weird tingling sensation in my anus."

Never mind. Of course he wasn't being serious.

"Weird like how, Ben?" Eddie asked.

Ben was about to respond when Richie asked, "What? You don't want to hear about my anus?"

"No, I want to hear what Ben was saying."

"When we were in the locker room earlier, I disappeared," Ben said. "Like, I was there, talking to you guys, and then suddenly it was as if no one could see me."

"I thought someone was missing," Eddie said. "You're not the only one Ben. I can hear... I can hear people's thoughts."

'Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.'

"Shut up Richie."

"I didn't say anything!" he protested. "Honestly, you do realize how ridiculous you two sound. Ben can't disappear and you can't hear thoughts. Like, if you could, you'd be able to tell me what I was thinking right now."

'This is bull shit. He's lucky he's cute.'

"You think this is bull shit," Eddie said, leaving out the last part. He wasn't cruel like Richie was.

"Well, that wasn't hard to guess."

"Guys, can you not fight?" Bill asked. "Let's just focus on cleaning this wall and we can talk about this later?"

"Yeah, fine," Eddie said. He should have known better than to get worked up over it. He leaned over to pat Ben's back in a silent apology.

"Richie?" Bill asked, giving him a look.

"There's nothing else to talk about," Richie said. "Those two are crazy. Problem solved."

"You know what? Fuck you."

Eddie threw his brush into one of the buckets and stormed off. He knew he shouldn't care what Richie said. In fact, he still wasn't entirely sure that he wasn't crazy himself, but he just couldn't take it anymore. He could hear some of the group yelling after him, but he didn't care. Let the probation worker see that he had walked out.

What was he going to do? Give him a few more hours? Honestly, Eddie would welcome it. It's not like Richie would still be there once he finished his hours. Eddie thought he might even enjoy it once Richie wasn't there running his motor mouth. His mother *never* let him do any cleaning around the house, claiming that the chemicals in the products were bad for his asthma, and he found that the work was rather calming in a way.

Plus, as he had said before, it got him out of the house, so...

Eddie sat down on a staircase that was about a fifteen minute walk from the community center. He had stopped running after the first minute but he still felt a little winded. He pulled his inhaler out from his pocket and took a couple of puffs. He still wasn't entirely sure if his asthma was as fake as everything else about his medical history, but it still helped him when he was feeling out of breath. He kept it out, turning it over in his hands, as he stared off across the estate.

He hadn't cried.

He hadn't cried when Henry Bowers's fist hit his jaw. He hadn't cried when he had fallen to the ground, hitting his head even harder, worsening the headache he could already feel coming. He hadn't cried when Henry Bowers started kicking him, yelling *that* word over and over again. He hadn't cried when he forced himself up and head butt Henry Bowers right in the fucking balls. He hadn't cried when he punched him over and over even though he didn't know how to do it properly and he probably hurt himself just as much as he hurt Bowers. He hadn't cried when the police took them in and Bowers's dad processed them. He hadn't cried as he watched that asshole walk away and he was handed a paper with a court date. He hadn't cried when the judge sentenced him to 100 hours of community service. He hadn't cried as his mother cried, asking where he darling little Eddie bear had gone, because *he* would have never done something like this to her.

But now? Now he cried. And all because of some stupid guy who had the audacity to be cute despite being the most annoying piece of shit Eddie had ever met. Why did he care what he thought?

That's how the probation worker found him.

Eddie sniffled, trying to wipe away the tears before he could see, and then faced him. He was about to apologize and explain the situation when he grabbed his arm.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Eddie yelled. "That hurts. Let go of me."

"None of you have any respect for authority," the probation worker was saying through gritted teeth. "I'm going to have to show you your place."

"What the fuck are you talking about? Seriously, let go of me."

Eddie started to panic as the probation worker was dragging him up the stairs. He went to grab his inhaler when he realized that he had dropped it when he had been grabbed. He was going to either be hurt by the one person at this place that was supposed to care about him or die from an asthma attack before that ever happened.

Except he wasn't going to let that happen. He was tired of being helpless. He had been in a fight now. He had *won* that fight. He could take care of himself.

He drew his arm back and brought his fist sharply into the probation workers side. He doubled over in pain, letting go of Eddie's arm, and Eddie went running. He knew if he went back for his inhaler first, he would only be caught. He couldn't think about how he was going to need it after running for his life because that would only slow him down. He would worry about that once he got into the community center. Because there was no where else safe nearby that he could think of. God, it was the last place on earth he wanted to go to, but at least he would also have back up. His six fellow parolees should still be there, scrubbing the graffiti off the wall.

Except they *weren't* there when he skidded to a halt in front of, now dripping, paint. He looked behind him and saw the probation worker slowly limping after him. There was no time to look for the others. He ran into the center and locked the door behind him before collapsing onto the floor.

He could hear someone shouting distantly and assumed it was the probation worker before he felt someone pressing their lips to his. He

pushed them away and started shouting himself.

"What the fuck? I'm not drowning!"

"Well, what else was I supposed to do?" Richie said, hands on his hips. "You were having trouble breathing!"

"Yeah, and your CO2 isn't going to help that! Plus, who knows what germs you just gave me? Gross."

"Do you have an inhaler?" Bev asked before he and Richie could get into another spectacular shouting match.

"I do, but it's back... back there." Eddie gestured uselessly. "Oh shit. The probation worker. He's gone crazy. Grabbed my arm and chased me."

Ben knelt down and gently took his arm to inspect it. Eddie could see that there were already bruises forming.

"It doesn't look sprained or anything, thankfully."

"Thanks Ben," Eddie said softly.

"Why did he do that?" Mike asked.

"I don't know. Maybe it has to do with the storm. The lightning. He seemed mad yesterday but not this mad. Not mad enough to attack someone... attack me."

I can't believe that asshole touched him. I'm going to kill him. I'll kill him.'

"I think Eddie has a point," Ben said, saving Eddie from addressing Richie's thoughts. "Like I said earlier, one moment I was there and then the next I was gone. I walked right in front of Bev and she didn't even see me."

"So what? You're saying the storm gave us all super powers or something?" Richie asked. "I'm sorry, but I still think this is all bull shit."

"Fine! Don't believe me then," Eddie said. "If you all aren't going to

help me, I'm getting out of here and going home where I'll be safe."

Eddie stomped over to the door and unlocked it. He had barely gotten it open an inch when the probation worker was there, a pipe in hand. He swung and the last thing Eddie remembered was hearing Richie's shouts. He had sounded absolutely heart broken.

"What the fuck? I'm not drowning!"

"Well, what else was I supposed to do?" Richie said. "You were having trouble breathing!"

Wait. Why did this feel vaguely familiar?

"Yeah, and your CO2 isn't going to help that!" Eddie said, almost as if he were reciting dialogue that had been placed in front of him. Without even thinking about what he was going to say next, he continued. "Plus, who knows what germs you just gave me? Gross."

"Do you have an inhaler?" Bev asked. She was leaning down to help Eddie find said inhaler, and over his shoulder, he could see Bill staring blankly into space. For some reason, that didn't seem right.

"I do, but it's back... back there." Eddie gestured toward the door, somehow feeling as if the others would automatically know what had happened. Where he meant. "Oh shit. The probation worker. He's gone crazy. Grabbed my arm and chased me."

They continued talking for awhile, Bill still standing there looking like a statue. Eddie was about to ask him if he was alright as Richie was shouting.

"So what? You're saying the storm gave us all super powers or something? I'm sorry, but I still think this is all bull shit."

"No! They're right," Bill said. God, he was as pale as a ghost. "Guys, all of this? Just happened. And then the probation worker. He comes to find Eddie and he... he kills him."

Eddie lost his breath again. Bev reached over and rubbed reassuring circles on his back.

"You have got to be shitting me!" Richie said, throwing his hands up. "So we've got a mind reader, an invisible man, and now a time traveler. What are we supposed to be? The Fantastic Four, uh, times two?"

"I don't know what we're supposed to be, but it's the truth. And even if we don't open that door like Eddie did the last time, the probation worker is going to find a way in eventually. We have to come up with a plan."

"He's right," Stan said. "Richie, I don't really buy into all of this either, but there's the evidence that the probation worker *is* coming after us. We have to focus on that for now."

"Alright, you're right. So, what do we do? We can't leave, even through the other door. He's too close, and there's too many of us to leave without him noticing."

"Should we hide?" Ben asked.

"No, he has to know this place really well," Mike pointed out. "I think we should wait until he gets in through that door and *then* go out the back."

"Well, that just might be stupid enough to work," Richie said. "Alright. Come on, Eds. Let's get you up."

"Do you ever stop with the nick names?" Eddie mumbled, but he allowed Richie to help him stand up.

Bev gave them a knowing look when Richie didn't even offer her his other hand. Ben took the opportunity to offer his instead. At first he looked excited to be holding her hand, but suddenly his face shifted into one of extreme pain. He cried out as he dropped Bev's hand, blowing lightly on his palm. Bev was asking him if he was alright, and so the two of them didn't notice what the rest of them did.

"Bev, your hand is on fire," Stan said.

"Yeah, it *was* pretty hot," Ben said, trying to laugh the whole thing off.

"No, like, Stan means it's literally on fucking fire," Richie said.

Bev held her hand up and gasped as the flames surrounding her hand shot up even higher.

"What the hell is going on?" she asked.

"Fucking human torch, man!" Richie said. He seemed oddly happy about that. He was a comic geek, wasn't he? Eddie rolled his eyes. "Oh my God, okay. So you guys are right. Damn, what about the rest of us. Mike? Stan?"

"I don't really think that's what matters right now," Bill said. "The plan, remember?"

The seven of them made their way from the hallway to the room with the Foosball table, which honestly felt like it had been years since Eddie had found Richie playing it. They were so close to reaching the doors when Stan slipped on something and fell. Mike went over to help him up but Stan started freaking out, pushing him away.

"It's blood," he said, holding his hands out in front of him. Sure enough, they were covered in blood. "Why is there... oh my God, I'm covered in fucking blood."

He started furiously wiping his hands on his orange coveralls, trying to get it off. It wasn't working very well, which only caused him to panic more. Mike was trying to talk him down, but it wasn't helping. Tears started streaming down Stan's face and then --

-- he went shooting up into the ceiling.

His head hit the tiles hard and sent him back down into the pool of blood and he cried harder.

"Holy shit, Stan can fly," Richie said, his grip on Eddie's hand tightening.

And wait. They were still holding hands? Things were really fucked

up if Eddie had managed to forget that.

"Who gives a shit that I can fly?" Stan screeched. "I'm covered in blood, in case you had forgotten. Do any of you shitheads have water powers or something? Since it turns out we're all freaks now."

Mike held his hand out in front of Stan and stared at him intently for a minute before letting out a long sigh.

"No, I don't think I have water powers."

"Jesus, I wasn't serious."

"Are you allowed to say Jesus?" Richie asked. "You know, since the whole..."

He pointed to the back of his own head and Stan reached back to make sure his yarmulke was safe. He sighed in relief, which Mike seemed confused by.

"Is it there?" he asked. "I don't... I don't see it. I just see Stan's hair. I see... oh my God."

It was Mike's turn to fall over, although thankfully he missed the pool of blood.

"What is it Mike?" Bill asked.

"I could see his hair and then his scalp and then... I think I'm going to be sick."

Mike leaned over and threw up near Richie's shoes, causing him to jump backward. He was still holding on tightly to Eddie's hand, so he had no choice but to go with him, bumping into his side. There was just too much going on that he let himself rest there. At this point, he really didn't give a shit and Richie's body heat was comforting. Apparently, Richie felt the same way.

'Oh God, he's so close. He feels so soft. I'm gonna break him. Then he'll kill me. What a way to go, though.'

Eddie couldn't help but laugh to himself.

"Glad to think you think this is funny, asshole," Stan said.

Bill and Ben had helped him and Mike up. Bev's hand had finally stopped burning and she was now holding Ben close. Eddie let out a sigh of relief, glad that he and Richie weren't the only ones looking for some physical comfort. It quieted his mind, for the moment at least. It even let him rest his chin on Richie's shoulder.

"Sorry Stan, I wasn't laughing at you," he said. "It's like... nervous laughter. There's just so much going on."

Stan was about to reply when a thunderous crash came from the hallway.

Fuck. They had forgotten about the probation worker.

"Out the door," Bill yelled.

Eddie and Richie were the closest, so they dropped their death grips on each other's hand and rushed over to try and push the doors open, but they wouldn't budge.

"Shit," Richie said. "They're all locked. I think he locked them from the outside when we weren't paying attention."

"Oh no, I fucked us all over," Stan cried out.

He ran his hands down his face, no longer caring that he was getting streaks of blood everywhere.

The probation worker came running into the room then and everyone started screaming. He ignored the others and went straight for Eddie, grabbing the same arm as he had earlier. Eddie cried out in pain and Richie jumped onto the probation worker's back. He started pounding him with his fists, but it seemed to have no affect on him. Bev ran up to him and placed her hands on his face. She closed her eyes in concentration and in a moment, her hands lit up once more. The probation worker yelled and dropped Eddie's arm as he staggered back. Richie was still clinging onto his neck, and with his balance thrown out of proportion, he fell down. Richie groaned, essentially having been elbowed in the gut, before rolling out from under him and rushing back to Eddie's side.

"Eds, are you alright?" he asked.

"Yeah, I think so." Eddie rubbed his arm gently. "I didn't think it could hurt anymore."

"Did we... did we just kill him?" Ben asked tentatively.

They all stood around the probation worker, watching him carefully. There were two hand shaped burn marks on his face, but they didn't look severe enough to have killed him. But it also appeared he wasn't breathing. Eddie didn't know where the odd surge of bravery came from, but he stepped forward slightly, and poked the probation worker in the side with the toe of his shoe. He didn't move, but Eddie couldn't be entirely sure with one little poke, so he touched him once more. The probation worker jumped up and grabbed Eddie's leg, throwing him forcefully on his back. It knocked all the breath out of him for the third time that day, and he just couldn't do it anymore. He laid there, gasping for breath out of instinct, but he was positive that this was finally it.

He could distantly hear Richie screaming, and a disgusting splat, and then the rest of them joining in. When he realized that his breathing was under control and he still wasn't about to die, he pushed himself up onto his elbows and saw that the six of them were kicking the probation worker to a bloody pulp. He fell back onto the ground, more blood trickling out of his mouth.

"Okay, so he is dead now, right?" Ben asked.

"I don't think you can just much more dead than that," Richie said.

And then it was his turn to turn to the side and throw up.

"We just killed our fucking probation worker!" Stan yelled.

"We had to!" Mike said, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "He was going to kill Eddie. He was going to kill *all* of us."

"I think he killed someone else already, too," Bill pointed out.

They all turned their attention back to the pool of blood and how it led to one of the lockers. Bill opened the door and a body fell out on

top of him. They all screamed again, but once they calmed down, Bill shoved the body off of himself with an exasperated sigh.

"Does anyone know who this is?" he asked.

"I don't recognize him," Mike said as he bent down to look. "I mean, there has to be other staff here, right? Our probation worker couldn't have been the only one who works here, so it was probably one of his coworkers that was still here yesterday after the storm. I mean, the police will be able to identify him, so that's not our problem. Does anyone have their phone on them?"

"Whoa, hold on. Nobody is calling the police," Richie said. "Who cares who this guy is? All it means is that now we're stuck with two fucking dead bodies, which I hate to break it to you, but two is definitely worse than one. The cops are going to take one look at this and we are *all* going to jail."

"But it was self defense!" Ben said. "They have to believe us. There's seven witnesses."

"What do you mean seven? I didn't do anything," Eddie said. "I was on the floor. I didn't know what was going on."

'We were trying to fucking save you, you beautiful idiot!'

"God, shut up Richie," Eddie muttered.

"Get out of my head!" Richie yelled, face bright red. "And anyway, my point is even though there's seven of us, the police don't believe people who have already been arrested and are on community service. They'll take one look at this, say we killed them both, and that's it. We're done for. No. We can't call the police."

"I hate to say it, but Richie is right," Bev said. "You guys have to admit that this doesn't look good. We have to get rid of them."

"And how the fuck are we supposed to do that?" Stan asked.

"Oh, I got this. I got this." Richie went running out into the hallway and came back with two wheelchairs. "We were fooling around in these earlier, Eds," he explained. "So we clean these guys up, clean up

the floor and the locker, and then take them out for a walk."

"Out for a walk?" Stan asked. He leaned over and punched Richie several times in the shoulder. "What the fuck does that mean?"

"So we can get them somewhere to bury them asshole! If anyone sees us, they'll just think we're some lovely people, doing our part for the community, and taking some disabled veterans out for a stroll."

"That could work," Bill said. "But where are we going to bury them?"

"There's that overpass," Ben suggested. "It's about two miles south. It's secluded since it's near the forest. No one goes there. I mean, unless they're driving over it. No one would see us."

"Perfect," Richie said, rubbing his hands together. "Alright, you guys get to cleaning."

"What do you mean 'you guys?'" Eddie asked.

"I came up with the plan, so I did my part."

"Oh my God, you are *such* a dickhead," Eddie said. "You're still helping us."

'*Anything for you,*' Riche thought, but all he said was a drawn out, "Fine."

Ben had been right. The area underneath the overpass was completely abandoned and all the trees nearby provided the perfect cover. No one stopped them as they walked the two bodies in the wheelchairs over and, once the coast was clear, they made a break for it and ran from the road to the empty space. There was some graffiti on the concrete walls, but it was easy enough to see that no one had been down there for a long time. Bill and Mike had found three shovels in the community center, which they had brought along, walking farther behind the rest of the group so it appeared that they were occupied with a different task. They all took turns digging two graves for the probation worker and the unfortunate

other body. Perhaps someday they'd see a missing poster and know the poor guy's name.

Eddie honestly hoped that didn't happen, though. He already felt sick with everything that had happened. Knowing the man's man would only serve to make him feel guiltier.

At the moment, he and Richie were in the one hole digging while Bill was in the other. Bev and Ben were standing near the road -- close enough to keep an eye out but far way enough that they wouldn't be seen. Stan and Mike were sitting on the ground, talking quietly as they waited for their turn. They were almost done since thankfully with seven people it had gone pretty quickly. It felt weird to say, but Eddie was starting to calm down as the end was in sight.

Of course, Richie had to open his big mouth and ruin that.

"So, once we wipe our hands of this, what are we going to do? Now that we're like super heroes."

"We're not super heroes," Stan said, glaring at him.

"Fuck yeah we are," Richie insisted. "Like, proper super heroes and everything. We should, like, do some good."

"You can't actually believe that."

"I *actually* believe that."

"Shame, since you're the only one who doesn't have one," Mike joked.

"Yeah, that's right. You don't have a power," Stan said.

"Which is bull shit. I was there. I should have one of these bull shit powers."

"You can have mine," Eddie said quietly. Then, the anger building, he added, "If you want to know what everyone is thinking about you all the time."

Richie stood there for a moment, leaning against the handle of his shovel, thinking.

"Hhhmmm, not so much. No, I want something good. Something from the A List. Seriously. It's bull shit that I don't have a power. No! I have to have one. I can feel it in my balls."

Eddie groaned and stuck his tongue out at Richie when he looked over to wink at him.

"Maybe you can't feel pain," Bill suggested.

"Oh, I like that one. Maybe that's it." Eddie leaned over and slapped him. "Ow. What the fuck was that for?"

"You felt it, didn't you?" he asked with a smirk.

'He should not be so cute when he's slapping me. Oh God, am I into that? No, I can't be. Am I?'

"Stop thinking about your weird kinks," Eddie muttered and then started digging again.

"Anyway, we're not fucking super heroes," Stan repeated. "No one can know I have a power. I don't want people to think I'm even more of a freak then they already do."

"Hey," Mike said gently. "You're not a freak. None of us are freaks. Except maybe Richie."

"Yeah, a super freak," Richie spit back.

It was getting dark by the time they had finished burying the bodies. By the time they had made their way back to the community center they had agreed that they had to keep the powers a secret and got their story straight as to what had happened. Because it was inevitable that the police would eventually investigate. So they cleaned up, got dressed, and said their goodbyes before heading home.

Eddie's mom was yelling at him for being late as soon as he was in the door. He tried to explain to her that he couldn't control how long his community service went for, but she was having none of it. She 'sent him to his room' as if he was 13 again and not 22. Well, he had been planning on locking himself in there and never coming out

again, so he wasn't going to fight it. He collapsed on his bed and tried to fall asleep but he couldn't. He was busy thinking about the way the probation worker looked, face caved in, and blood everywhere. How everyone looked horrified when they had realized what they had done. How Richie was going to stand by it because he would have done anything to save Eddie only though they had only known each other for two days. Not even two *full* days.

He imagined Richie at his own house, trying to figure out what his power was. Bev sitting on her balcony, lighting up one of her cigarettes with the tip of her finger. Ben turning invisible so he could sneak out for the first time in his life. Mike looking through the walls to check on his family while he hid in his own room. Stan flying higher and higher to get away from it all. And Bill? He imagined Bill going back in time and saving his little brother. Eddie thought he would look just like Bill, but younger obviously, and he'd smile so brightly knowing that his brother had literally bent the rules of time to rescue him. It was these thoughts of his new friends that helped him calm down enough to finally fall asleep.

2. Episode Two

Summary for the Chapter:

[Richie] thought he had his act pretty together. Sure, there had been that incident that landed him in community service, but he had just been joking around. He had his friends that he went out with, he had his own hobbies, and he was holding down a job. Of course, now thanks to community service, he had to cut his hours so he was part time, but he was still making enough to help his parents out. He would have also added that he had a stable living arrangement, but he couldn't say that anymore. His point was, he for sure had his act fucking together, thank you very much.

Well, other than having a long term girlfriend, which he knew his mom was just dying for. She wanted him to settle down and move out. Richie did want to settle down some day, absolutely, but it wouldn't be with the girlfriend his mom so desperately was wishing for.

So, did 'get your act together' seriously mean to stop making his jokes? It's not like he was hurting anyone. Maybe embarrassing them a little bit, but that's how jokes worked!

Notes for the Chapter:

for this one i took a little more creative liberty although i do love the absurdity of the original episode and feel like it would work well for richie in other cases, but for this story i'm going the "richie is working on accepting his sexuality" route

The thing was, Richie's parents were actually pretty fucking cool parents. Well, they were cool parents when you were a teen and they'd let you have a sip or two of their beer. They'd let you have a small party if they were away for the weekend. They had never embarrassed Richie in front of his friends; in fact they all loved his

parents and would insist they hung out at the Tozier house after school.

But now Richie was an adult. Which, like, who allowed him to be an adult? Seriously?

But yeah, he was an adult, and his parents suddenly didn't seem so cool. They constantly chastised him for how much he drank. They would yell at him for having friends over even though he paid them rent. He had a right to invite people over if he wanted to. They'd say that they were making too much noise, making too much mess, and that Richie needed to find better friends.

And then, two days ago, he had come home to find that they had changed the locks and left his stuff in the driveway. Which in itself was depressing, but what really got to him was the fact that everything he owned fit into two small bags. He supposed that not focusing on material things was technically good. Wasn't that supposed to make you a happier person? Then why wasn't he happy? Oh shit. His comic book collection! He should have known that was going to hold him back.

He had tried to reason with his mom and dad through the door, but they told him that he wasn't allowed back until he got his act together.

What did that mean?

He thought he had his act pretty together. Sure, there had been that incident that landed him in community service, but he had just been joking around. He had his friends that he went out with, he had his own hobbies, and he was holding down a job. Of course, now thanks to community service, he had to cut his hours so he was part time, but he was still making enough to help his parents out. He would have also added that he had a stable living arrangement, but he couldn't say that anymore. His point was, he for sure had his act fucking together, thank you very much.

Well, other than having a long term girlfriend, which he knew his mom was just dying for. She wanted him to settle down and move out. Richie *did* want to settle down some day, absolutely, but it

wouldn't be with the girlfriend his mom so desperately was wishing for. He couldn't even blame being kicked out on his parents knowing he was gay, though! He was positive that they had no idea. He made sure to keep that secret close. He had maybe made out with a few guys here and there at parties when he was younger -- back before everyone had camera phones, so it's not like there was any actual evidence of that. And as he got older, he hadn't really thrown himself into the gay dating scene. Sure, people in their town were relatively accepting, but there were still enough homophobic assholes that he would just rather focus on other aspects of his life. So there definitely was no fucking way they found out.

So, did 'get your act together' seriously mean to stop making his jokes? It's not like he was hurting anyone. Maybe embarrassing them a little bit, but that's how jokes worked!

Well, he could worry about that later. At that moment, he had to worry about his living situation. He had tried calling his friends to see if anyone could let him crash on their couch for a few days, but every single one of them had an excuse, each one more ridiculous than the last. By the time he had made it to Fred, he knew that someone earlier on had warned the rest of them. Maybe his parents *had* been right that his friends weren't the best, but Richie still hadn't anticipated that. He was desperate and all he could think about was he needed to get some sleep after the, frankly traumatizing, day he had.

And that's how he had found himself sleeping at the community center.

He had made sure to set his phone alarm early enough that he'd have time to get ready, have a quick breakfast from the vending machine, and get in a game of Foosball before the others started showing up and he could sneak out and pretend to arrive with them.

He had been surprised once again when Eddie had shown up early.

He couldn't really be mad, though. God, Eddie was so adorable. Well, pretty much their whole little group was hot and it wasn't going to be good for Richie's health, but Eddie in particular was just as cute as a button. Richie wanted to pinch his cheeks and pet his hair and kiss

his lips and... Nope. He couldn't let his mind wander there. Crushing on a guy was the last thing he needed. He had to convince his parents to let him move back into the house before he even *thought* about anything like that.

That didn't mean he couldn't apologize to him for being a bit of a jerk the day before.

Somehow he had messed that up as well, and Eddie started to ignore him. Pointedly so once he had put his headphones in. Richie sighed but had turned to the others and joined their conversation.

And then all that other shit went down. The rest of those losers got super powers and here was Richie, the one guy who had wanted nothing more than to be just like the heroes he had looked up to his entire life, powerless. Wow, his life *was* really going downhill fast.

He was scared to sneak back into the community service that night. It felt like returning to the scene of the crime. Well, technically, that was exactly what he was doing, but he figured if a spy was watching him, and he *didn't* sneak back into the community center, they might think something was up. So he walked a couple of blocks with everyone before he doubled back and climbed in through the window he had left open. He had stored his bags in the locker he had been using for his clothes the first day, so he went back there and pulled out his sleeping bag. He set it up on the small balcony that looked over the main room of the community center. It had seemed like the best place to set up camp the night before and he was definitely too tired now to see if there was a better place to sleep. As soon as his head hit the pillow, he was out like a light.

LMFAO's Party Rock started blasting right into Richie's ear, causing him to yell out as he reached out to grab it. Without his glasses on, he had missed his mark, and instead sent his phone flying over the edge of the balcony. He winced as he heard it crash onto the floor. With a sigh, he got up and shoved his glasses onto his face before he went down the stairs to retrieve his phone and finally silence the awful party music. Then he took a quick shower, threw on some

clothes he thought were clean, and climbed back out the window. He walked up to the community center to see that Eddie and Stan were already sitting at one of the picnic tables.

"Hey losers!" Richie yelled as he jumped onto the bench next to Eddie. He simply rolled his eyes as if he knew Richie was there, which he probably had with the whole mind reading thing, but Stan jumped nearly a foot in the air. "What's up?"

"Well, we *were* having a private conversation," Stan said as he glared at him.

"Stan, my man, was that jump you did actual flying? Or did I scare you that bad?"

Eddie laughed but tried to hide his smile behind his hand. It was too late, however, and Stan then directed his glare toward him.

"Why don't you piss off Richie?"

"I mean, we all have to wait, so we might as well keep each other company." Richie threw his arm around Eddie's shoulder and gave him a noogie. "Eds totally wants me to stay, right Eds?"

"Maybe if you keep your mind quiet," Eddie said as he pushed Richie away. "It's bad enough you run your mouth."

"You love it and you know it," Richie shot back but he mellowed out and let Eddie and Stan continue their conversation.

He had to admit that he didn't get the *best* night's sleep, laying on the floor in his crappy old sleeping bag from his ill advised Boy Scout days, so he was too tired to actually rile everyone up. Once Bill, Ben, Mike, and Bev joined them, they made their way inside and got into their orange coveralls. They lined up in the main room and waited for the probation worker like nothing had happened. Of course, he wasn't there. Instead there was a woman, who was in the office yelling on the phone before she she came over to them.

"Tony, your probation worker, and Gary, one of our other employees, have been missing since yesterday afternoon." Richie tried to look as surprised as he could. "Now, the police have already been informed,

and they may be here later to talk to you. There is a possibility you were the last ones to have seen them. If there was anything out of the ordinary that you noticed yesterday, I'd greatly appreciate it if you told me."

The other six shook their heads, looking as guilty as the cat who got the canary. Richie sighed and raised his hand.

"Yes?" the woman asked excitedly.

"Yeah, I went to take a piss... I'm sorry ma'am, take a whiz..." Eddie muffled another laugh behind his hand. "And when I walked into the bathroom I saw Tony fucking... I mean, lovingly having sex with Gary. Like, just going right for it like..." Richie started to mime fucking someone doggy style, complete with a rather enthusiastic ass slap here and there. He drew the line, however, at throwing in the moaning or dirty talk he imagined Tony and Gary engaging in. "So, uh, yeah. My theory is that they have run off into the sunset together to live out their lives as two happy gay men and who are we... *who* are we to judge them for that?"

If looks could kill, the looks that the rest of the losers were giving him would have knocked him dead. The woman looked like she was about to cry.

"I hope for your sake that if the police come by, you take it more seriously then," she said, her voice as cool as ice. "Now, the residents from a nearby nursing home will be coming here later for a social. I would have told you ahead of time, but I was obviously busy on the phone. You're allowed to change back into your street clothes since you'll be working the social. Talking with the residents, helping them with the buffet. I expect all of you to be nice to them."

"Absolutely ma'am," Richie said as he gave her a salute.

She stormed back into the office, and once she was no longer paying attention to them, Stan leaned over and punched his shoulder.

"What the fuck?" he asked. "We had a plan! We all agreed to the plan! What the fuck were you doing?"

"We said to act normal! I acted like I normally would," Richie said.

"Well, he does have a point," Eddie said. "It would probably be weird if he *didn't* act like a total tool."

"Thank you." Richie froze. "Hey. Wait. You just insulted me. Actually, I'm not really that offended. I kind of like it."

Eddie rolled his eyes as the rest of the losers high tailed it out of there and made their way to the locker room as fast as they could.

"Unfortunately, I know that."

"Dude, are you just living in my head? Why aren't you reading anyone else's minds?"

"Okay, first off asshole," Eddie said, getting all up in Richie's face. Well, as close to as he could get. He was pretty short in comparison. Like, just the right size for Richie to rest his chin on the top of his head, which he really wanted to do. And judging by Eddie's face, he had fucking heard that. "*First* off, I don't know how it works, okay? If I did, I would have shut it off by now. Secondly, I'm not not only hearing you, but you're the one I'm getting the most because even in your fucking head, you can't shut up!"

"Oh, so you *are* hearing what's going on in everyone else's head? Did that lady believe me?"

"I didn't quite catch that. I was still trying to wrap my head around what the hell had gotten into you."

"Shame. It'd be nice to know that we were in the clear. But if I can't have that, I would love the hot gossip. What is everyone else thinking?"

"What? No, I'm not going to tell you that! It's bad enough that I hear their private thoughts."

Richie clasped his hands together and got down on his knees so he could beg properly.

"Please, Eds, my love. It doesn't have to be anything invasive. Just a

few small things?"

"Will it get you to shut up?" Eddie asked with a sigh. Richie nodded enthusiastically. "Okay. Fine. Uh, Stan was thinking about birds earlier before you got here."

"Birds?"

"Yeah, I think he's a bird watcher. He was thinking some pretty rude things about something called a gnatcatcher."

"Oh, that sounds dirty." Eddie punched him in the shoulder, and Richie was honestly worried he was going to have a bruise there with all the punching the rest of them were doing. He rubbed it with a small wince. "Okay, I get the hint. I'm shutting up. Come on. Let's go get changed."

"Ben was thinking about how he would have dressed nicer to impress Bev if he had known we'd be wearing our street clothes today," Eddie said quietly as they went to join the others.

If Richie was grinning like an idiot when they entered the locker room, he couldn't have cared less. Even if both Stan and Mike gave him a knowing look.

Everyone else was already back into the clothes they had arrived in but were hanging around in the locker room, making no move to wait elsewhere. Richie leaned against Bev's locker and joined her and Ben's conversation while Eddie got changed. He hoped that if he stalled long enough they would get tired of waiting for him and they'd head out so he could open his locker without worrying that they'd notice there was far more in it than a shirt and a pair of pants.

Of course, they had to be the nicest fucking people who ended up on community service ever, because once Eddie was back into his stupidly adorable outfit, they continued to wait for Richie.

"Really guys, you can go wait outside. I'm a big boy, I promise. I can get dressed by myself."

Although he wouldn't mind if Eddie helped him take off his coveralls.

"Jesus Christ Richie," Eddie yelled and then stormed out of the locker room.

Well, at least Richie wouldn't embarrass himself in front of him. He didn't mind as much about the others, although he would much prefer if none of them found out that he was homeless. Wow, it probably was a good thing he didn't know how to control himself around Eddie because all his thoughts about his adorable little button nose were blocking out all the anxiety running through his head about the fact that was fucking homeless. Thank goodness that freak storm didn't give them all mind reading powers because then he would have been definitely screwed. There was no way his ADHD would allow him to hide it from all six of them. He could barely concentrate enough to play Tetris on his phone.

With a deep breath, he positioned himself to block his locker as best as he could, and then opened the door as fast as lightning.

Oh, maybe he had lightning powers.

He grabbed the clothes he had put on that morning, which he had thankfully just thrown on top of his bags, and then slammed the locker door shut before anyone could peek inside. Once he had let his coveralls pool around his ankles, he realized that he was supposed to put those back into the locker after he changed. God, he wanted to slap some sense into himself. Oh well. He had to adapt and overcome.

"This isn't your mother's house," Stan scolded him when Richie left them in a pile on the floor.

Which he had though had been an easy enough solution. It was the kind of ignorant thing people would expect him to do, when he was actually very good at cleaning up after himself, thank you very much. Normally he wouldn't have minded too much if the losers thought he was a slob because he supposed the funny one was usually expected to be a slob, but it was the 'mother's house' dig that got to him. His eyes felt dangerously watery, so he ducked his head before anyone could tell, and went running into Stan so he could tackle him.

Why was *that* the first thing he thought of that would explain why he

ducked his head? Well, it was too late. He had to commit to it now.

He and Stan went falling to the floor, Stan's arms flailing as he yelled at him to get off, and the rest of the losers were laughing at his antics. He was in the clear!

The six of them joined Eddie in the main room to see that he had already set up for the social. There was a long folding table along one of the walls that was filled with a punch bowl, several bags of snacks, and a plate of mini sandwiches. There were chairs set up in a few clusters, but the middle of the room was completely clear, and considering that there was oldies music playing from somewhere, Richie figured that meant it was supposed to be a dance floor. Oh boy. He was going to get to dance with some senior citizens.

Sweet.

Best day of community service ever.

The only thing that would be better would be if he got to dance with Eddie.

Said loser's head snapped up and he gave Richie a look. More of a longing look than an annoyed one, though. Richie smiled softly and gave him a little wave, and Eddie smiled back.

God, Richie wished he was brave enough to flirt with him for real. He wished he could take Eddie out. Treat him right. Be all chivalrous and shit. He never had the chance to do that for anyone, and he realized how nice it really would be. But he couldn't do that once he moved back into his parents's house. And for the first time in the past two days, he thought maybe he should start looking into finding his own place. It would be difficult on a part time salary, but he would make it work. And once he had his own place, he would ask Eddie out. A movie sounded like a good first date. They'd be able to hold hands that way.

Richie was so caught up in his day dream that he hadn't noticed Eddie coming over until the mini sandwich had been shoved into his face. The mayonnaise made sure that it stayed stuck to his cheek for a moment before the bread and cucumber went sliding to the floor.

Stan and Bill were laughing at him as Bev asked Eddie, "Was that really necessary?"

"At least Bev is on my side," Richie muttered as he wiped his face. "Where's Mike and Ben? I think they'd be on my side too."

"We're actually working," Mike said as he came back into the main room. There was a woman, wearing a cardigan obnoxious enough to marvel Richie's button up, on his arm. "The residents are already arriving. Me and Ben are starting to escort them in. You're welcome to join us if you want, you lazy bums."

"Hey, I set everything up!" Eddie protested.

"And you did a great job," Bev said as she patted his arm as she passed by.

She was going out the door as Ben came in with two elderly men talking his ear off. The one to his right drifted from the conversation when he saw Richie. He smiled at him and then motioned to his shirt. Richie looked down at his own, thinking he was pointing out that Richie had some of the mini sandwich stuck to it, but it was squeaky clean surprisingly. He looked back up and realized that the man had been pointing to a little rainbow badge that was sewed onto his. Richie froze and quickly looked around to make sure that none of the other losers had seen.

He practically went running out so he could join Bev at the vans that were parked out in front of the community center and escort a few residents in himself. What had he been thinking? That he could ask Eddie out. He was crazy. Once he and the residents were inside, he made sure to engage them in conversation immediately -- a conversation that they had no hopes of escaping from. The other man seemed disappointed but he didn't approach Richie. Maybe he did feel a little rude for having done that. The poor guy probably thought Richie was a homophobe now. Sure, Richie wasn't exactly ready to come out to anyone, but he didn't want people thinking the worst of him either. As the social was really taking off, Richie decided that he was going to have to talk to him. He finally left his poor victims who made their way over to Ben and Bill who where playing Gin with a few of the other residents. Richie found the man standing by the

punch bowl, so he busied himself with getting a glass first. He took a few sips, trying to think how he should approach this.

"You're not out," the man said. It wasn't a question and Richie choked slightly on his drink.

"Uh, no. No. I'm not."

"It's difficult. I know some people will tell you that it's easier now, like that makes it easy overall," the man said as he patted Richie's shoulder. Richie tried to not instinctively flinch away from him. "Yes, it *is* easier, but there's always going to be people out there that hate you for who you are. Which is fucking stupid."

"Are you allowed to say 'fuck?' I'm pretty sure there's an expatriation date for curse words, and you are passed it my good sir. No offense."

"Sorry, but I *am* pretty offended," the man said, and Richie was nervous he might have gone too far with his joking. But the man didn't look mad as he added, "If anything, I should be allowed to say it even fucking more."

Richie laughed.

"You know what? I think you have a point. I like you. What's your name?"

"I'm Ron." He offered Richie his hand, so Richie ditched his gross punch to shake it as he introduced himself in return. "Well, Richie, I really do hope someday you have a chance to be yourself openly. You don't want to waste your whole life hiding. Trust me."

"I wish you could get, like, a do over, man. You didn't deserve that."

"Which is why you have to promise me that when it's safe enough and you're ready, that you won't. Do it for me, okay?"

Richie looked over to Eddie, who was dancing with the woman who was wearing the unforgettable cardigan, and sighed.

"Yeah, Ron, I want to. There's just a lot going on, you know?"

"That's good enough for me. Now, talking about my do over, I think I *might* be able to do that in a way. You know that storm the other day?"

Richie was glad that he wasn't drinking the punch anymore because he would have either choked on it or dropped the glass. Did Ron get a power? Was that how he was able to tell that Richie was gay?

"Uh, yeah? That little thing?"

"Since then, I've been able to be young again at times. But I can't bring myself to go out on my own. Tonight, would you join me?"

"I don't think I can do that, Ron. I'm not ready for that."

"You'll just be my friend who came out with me. It doesn't have to mean anything. Please?"

It was unfair how adorable the little old man looked while he was flashing Richie puppy eyes. There was no way he could say no to that.

"Well, I guess it can't hurt," he said and Ron excitedly clapped his hands together. "I'll have to move some things around in my schedule, but I'll meet you at the nursing home at 7?"

Ron left then to mingle with Mike, Stan, and some of the other residents and Richie made his way to the impromptu dance floor and leaned over Eddie's shoulder.

"May I have this dance?"

"You absolutely may not," Eddie said through gritted teeth. "Me and Eleanor are getting along just fine without you."

Eleanor laughed, and Richie was surprised that she would laugh at his pain from the rejection. Well, damn. What else was he supposed to do for the rest of the day?

Turns out there was tons to do for the rest of the day. Richie had lots of fun, as did the rest of the losers, and everyone was surprised when their new probation worker returned to tell them it was time for the

residents to go home. They helped escort them back to the vans, Ron giving Richie a cheeky wink as he got buckled in, and waved as they drove off. The seven of them didn't bother changing into their coveralls before they cleaned the main room. It wasn't as if the residents had made much of a mess, but they still swept and mopped before the probation worker told them it was alright for them to leave. She didn't seem exactly happy about it, but it wasn't like she could continue holding them there waiting for police that obviously weren't coming to interview them.

When it was time to leave with everyone else, Richie decided he was going to just walk around before he had to meet Ron at the nursing home. So he made sure to safely lock his stuff when no one was paying attention to him and doubled back to only open up the window he had been using to get in and out. Then he set off for a nice, relaxing walk, checking his watch every one in a while so he wouldn't be late. He walked up to the nursing home at exactly seven and was told by the secretary at the front desk that visiting hours were over.

"Oh, really? I mean, Ron told me it was fine to meet him here at seven."

"That's because grandpa is a little absent minded," someone said from behind him. Richie turned around and gasped. The guy standing in front of him looked a little like Ron. He was taller, though, and definitely not in his 80s. "You were supposed to pick me up earlier."

"Uh, yeah. My bad," Richie said lamely.

"Junior, you know you can't be here this late," the secretary said, rolling her eyes. "Go on. Get out of here you two before someone else sees you."

"Okay, so to just be sure," Richie said once the two of them were outside, "you're not Ron's grandson. You *are* Ron? And you actually do have a power?"

Ron laughed as he shook his head. He grabbed Richie's hand, swinging them as they walked.

"What? Can't believe I was once this handsome?"

"Oh, you're still handsome. That's not why I'm shocked. I mean, I've seen my friends's powers, but it's still kinda hard to wrap my head around. How did you even find out that you could do this?"

"I woke up one morning and I was suddenly 28 again," Ron said with a shrug. "I snuck out of the nursing home and go to my family, but I was about a few blocks from my grandson's home when I turned back. It only lasts for a few hours at a time, it seems."

"Wow. Your family lives so far away. How do they get up here to visit you?"

Ron looked away quickly and that's when it hit Richie. Like, Ron had a real actual grandson and yet the secretary believed that young Ron was that grandson? She obviously had never met the real one, then. Sure, there could be a family resemblance, but there was no way they looked exactly the same. Wow, Richie had never wanted to punch someone he had never met so badly.

"Well, now I'm obviously Junior's boyfriend, and they'll let me in to visit, won't they?"

"Let's not worry about that tonight. You promised me we were going to have some fun."

Ron led Richie to a part of down town he was more than aware of but had never set foot there himself. There were rainbow flags flying everywhere, as well as some other ones he had no idea what they meant other than they were pride flags. Men walked hand in hand and women were kissing on the corner and no one even batted an eye. Ron had dropped Richie's hand once they had reached the neighborhood, and Richie had to admit that he missed how comforting it had felt. There was no time to worry about that, however, because Ron pointed out the bar that he had wanted to try out. Richie insisted on buying the first round and met up with Ron who had already made his home on the dance floor.

Richie's parents might have thought he was a no good party boy, but his partying was honestly limited to the comfort of his own home. He

didn't go out clubbing, and so it was difficult at first to find a way to dance while holding his glass and not have his drink spill everywhere. Ron, on the other hand, looked as if he had done this dozens of times before. First off, he actually knew how to dance. Richie supposed once you knew how to move you could apply that to any style, but it was still a little odd to see Ron shaking his ass to Shakira.

"Is this how you guys used to dance to Buddy Holly back in the day?" Richie yelled over the music.

"I wish it was," Ron said and then he suggestively wrapped his lips around his straw. "It definitely takes away a lot of the guesswork or 'is he really interested in me?' you know?"

"I don't know. I think it still can be hard. Oh my God, don't you dare... stop laughing. What are you? Twelve?"

"Thank God I didn't turn that young. You'd be stuck babysitting me instead of this!"

Ron threw his arms out and spun around a few times. Several of the guys on the dance floor cheered him on, and Richie finally felt himself letting go. He finished his beer and went to grab another before joining Ron once more. His dancing may have made him look like a flailing chicken next to him, but he was at the point where he honestly didn't give a fuck. He was having the time of his life and he was already planning in his head taking Ron out more to enjoy all of these things that he had missed. Maybe coming out wouldn't be as bad as he had made it to be. How could it be so bad if he got to have this once the day was done?

Ron bought them the next round, and the round after that, and then suggested that they slow down a little and get something to eat. They stumbled over to a nearby diner and ordered a ridiculous amount of breakfast food. After they had stuffed their faces, they explored all the different shops in the neighborhood. Ron bought some rainbow bracelets from the one store, and Richie picked up a dick shaped lollipop that he insisted on eating right then so he could thoroughly embarrass Ron. He never wanted the night to end, but they did have to sneak Ron back into the nursing home. And, well, he had to sneak

back into the community center so he could have a quick nap before another day of serving the community, but he wasn't going to tell Ron that. Richie couldn't have him worrying about him.

Richie boosted Ron up so he could climb through his room's window. He turned around and blew Richie a kiss before disappearing into the dark. Richie whisper-shouted that he'd come by to visit that evening, because it was technically the morning at that point, and then ran away before anyone noticed him creepily walking around the nursing home.

And the fact that he was more worried about that than someone having seen him in the gay bar spoke volumes.

"Do you have a date tonight or something?" Stan asked when he saw Richie that morning.

Sure, maybe Richie had put a little more thought into what he was wearing so that once they were done with their community service, so he could go visit Ron. Not that Ron would judge him for his normally eccentric style choices, but he felt like he had to show that he could dress nicely. Ron hadn't quite dressed his age the previous night, but he *had* looked like a young professional. He didn't want to embarrass him at the nursing home. He wanted all the other residents to think that he had the most awesome and put together family *ever*. Though that wasn't exactly a cool thing to say in front of the other losers.

"Yeah, man. I have a hot date with your mom. Didn't she tell you?"

Stan tried to jump him, but thankfully Bill and Mike grabbed him in time and saved Richie's skin.

It was a surprisingly boring day after that. Richie managed to annoy Stan a few more times as they picked up trash around the community center. Eddie yelled at him a few times for his ongoing internal narration. Ben made heart eyes at Bev. All of this seemed to be a part of his new normal, now, so he was almost disappointed there wasn't

anything to write home about. Mostly because it made the day go by so slowly. But finally, the new probation worker came out and told them they could go home, and Richie was practically running to the nursing home.

The secretary had no trouble signing him in, unlike the night before, and directed him to Ron's room. Richie knocked softly and, although he heard no answer, let himself in. Ron was hunched over in the chair next to his bed and Richie smiled to himself at how Ron was probably still recovering from their night of debauchery. He tried to shake him gently and wake him up, but he jumped back when he felt how cold he was.

Oh no.

"Ron, no. Ron, you're not seriously doing this to me, are you?" Richie asked, shaking. "Come on, man. Wake up. There's still so much we have to do. I only got to take you to one bar last night."

There was no answer.

Richie slumped down onto Ron's bed and started to cry. He gave himself a moment and then tried to pull himself together. He couldn't be here when someone came to check on Ron. He didn't know how he'd explain anything to them. He walked over to give Ron a quick kiss on the cheek when he noticed the photo album he was holding. Richie picked it up and flipped through, laughing at the pictures of Ron with his kids at birthday parties, and crying when he made it far enough back to see the ones of him with his army buddies. There was one guy in particular that was in quite a few. Richie ended up pausing at one where the guy had his arms around Ron's middle as he looked up at him. There was so much love in his eyes, and Richie found himself crying again. He carefully slid that one from the photo album before placing it back into Ron's hands.

"Thank you Ron," he said and then left before he could convince himself to stay.

He went back to the community center and propped up the photo next to his sleeping bag and fell asleep smiling.

3. Episode Three

Summary for the Chapter:

It had been like any other day. God, that sounded like such a cliché, but it really was.

"Now, here's my card if you need anything." [The detective] definitely sounded like he hoped that Bill never needed anything. "Otherwise, we'll be in contact if we find anything."

Which of course never happened because they weren't even looking. Bill didn't hear from Georgie before Monday and so he found himself and his parents making their way to the police station. They all got frustrated when Detective Roberts was still acting like it wasn't a big deal despite telling them that they'd start a search after the weekend.

Notes for the Chapter:

episode three is not only one of my fave episodes of misfits but honestly one of my fave episodes of any television show ever and i was so scared i was not going to do it justice in the end i made it work but really just ugh it was a challenge

There was a moment each morning when Bill first woke up that he forgot everything that had happened. For a blissful moment, he would lay there, thinking about all of the things he would get to do with Georgie for the day. Their parents weren't absent exactly, but they were often quite busy, so Bill had taken on a lot of the responsibility of raising his younger brother. He would get up and make them both breakfast before seeing Georgie off to the bus stop. Georgie of course would complain that he wasn't a little kid anymore and, 'Stop calling me Georgie, Bill. It's George now.' But he obviously looked forward to it as much as Bill did. He'd wave goodbye as he got on the bus and then Bill would head back home to get ready for work. Sometimes their mother or father would be around, although

they tended to start earlier than he did, so it would be quiet in the house when he left, and it would be quiet when he returned -- because of course they worked longer hours as well. But Georgie would be there waiting for him, and they'd play some video games, Bill would help him with his homework, and then they'd make dinner together. It might not have seemed like an exciting life to some, but to Bill it was everything.

But then, as the sun would blind him through the blinds, he would remember.

It would feel like a hundred pound weight would drop onto his chest, and he would gasp for breath as he reached out for someone who hadn't been there for almost a year now.

Georgie was his brother, his son, and his best friend all in one. In Bill's mind, he was still the sweet little kid that he had taught to ride his bike and took out to the river to play with toy boats. In reality he was fifteen. Well, sixteen now.

Because Bill knew he was still alive.

It had been like any other day. God, that sounded like such a cliché, but it really was. Bill had made them French toast which they ate over a very colorful discussion about Georgie's Algebra homework the night before. When he dropped him off at the bus stop, Georgie reminded him that he was going to his friend Steve's house after school, so 'Don't wait up for me, Bill. Get some sleep for once.' Bill had to laugh because maybe his brother had a point; he had been working hard recently. He still insisted that he called to check in before they went to sleep, and then made his way to the book shop. It was weird to eat dinner alone, which didn't make much sense. It's not like Georgie didn't have friends and went out sometimes.

No, something felt *off* that day.

It was a Friday, so he hadn't expected the kids to go to sleep early, but nine very quickly became eleven became two in the morning. Bill woke their parents up, telling them that something must be wrong, but they rolled over and mumbled something about 'not worrying so

much.'

Bill called Steve's house and, after his parents scolded him for calling so late, learned that Georgie had never come over that day. In fact, he and Steve hadn't even planned to hang out at all.

Thankfully, Steve's parents took it seriously, and went into his room to wake him up. He eventually admitted that he agreed to cover for Georgie but that he had no idea what he had actually gone.

That's when Bill called the police.

Detective Roberts was the officer who was assigned to the case, and from the moment he walked in the door, Bill could tell he wasn't taking it seriously. Bill's parents had gotten once he had told them what Steve's parents told him. The detective talked to them first, and Bill was surprised when he called Bill in next so soon. He had ended up only asking Bill three or four questions before he had started talking about how teenage boys run away all the time. How Georgie probably would show up after the weekend was over as if nothing had happened.

"You don't know my brother!" Bill yelled. "He's... he's not like that! He wouldn't just disappear like this! Even if he was going out to have fun and felt he had to lie about it, he promised he would check in with me, so he *would* have checked in!"

"He lied to you because he went to some weekend party where there was booze and drugs, probably," Detective Roberts said as he flipped close his notebook. A uniformed officer came down the stairs, carrying one piece of Georgie's clothing in an evidence bag. He turned to him and motioned to wait outside. "We have that shirt, so if you still haven't heard anything from him by Monday, we can look further into it."

Bill wanted to tear his hair out at that point.

"It could be too late by Monday! Don't they always say that the first 24 hours is the most important?"

"For children, yes."

"He is a kid! He doesn't even have a driver's license yet. So there isn't even a way for him to get to some 'big house party' like you think he did."

"Sir, I'm sure he has more than enough friends who would have offered a ride. Now, here's my card if you need anything." He definitely sounded like he hoped that Bill never needed anything. "Otherwise, we'll be in contact if we find anything."

Which of course never happened because they weren't even looking. Bill didn't hear from Georgie before Monday and so he found himself and his parents making their way to the police station. They all got frustrated when Detective Roberts was still acting like it wasn't a big deal despite telling them that they'd start a search after the weekend. He kept referencing all these cases of teenage boys that had run away in the area over the past year, and Bill had started to think he was going crazy. That wasn't a coincidence! It was a pattern. Which of course just pissed the detective off who yelled at him for saying how he should do his job. They were all discretely escorted from the police station but were invited to join the search once it was finally arranged.

If you could even call it a search.

There were two dogs and only a handful more officers. Bill was able to find a few volunteers to come along but their enthusiasm started to fizzle out after the first couple of hours. There wasn't that many wooded areas around and the police refused to do a door to door search, so Bill and his parents were returning home before it was even fully dark outside.

If his parents had been distant before, it was as if Bill never saw them after that. He would forget that they even lived in the same house.

Bill went in the complete opposite direction when it came down to dealing with Georgie's disappearance. He got angry. He spent months researching the other cases of missing teenage boys -- noting the similarities they had in looks, making the connections between the

last places they'd been seen, and working out the timeline. If all of the cases were truly connected, the person who had been taking them had been doing so for nearly five years. And since they'd been getting away with it for so long, they definitely weren't going to stop any time soon.

The only case that Bill didn't have that much information on was Georgie's case. Which, God, he hated referring to it that way, but he had to admit that it *was* a case. Georgie was gone, and Bill was sure that he had been taken. His case was just too new for the information to have leaked enough that Bill could find it easily considering he wasn't particularly good with computers or anything.

And so that's how he found himself breaking into the police station and getting caught. Detective Roberts did his job for once when he arrested him, although he made it seem as if he was doing him a favor for testifying in his defense. Being stuck with 100 hours of community service was going to cut into the time he had to search for Georgie.

Then --

-- the storm happened.

After Bill had found out that he could turn back time, he immediately went home and tried to go back to the beginning of the year. Unfortunately, he had no idea how any of it worked, and all he succeeded in doing was giving himself a headache.

When he went back to the community center the next day, he was worried that it might just happen randomly again, but instead he had a surprisingly fun day playing cards with the residents of the nursing home. He calmed down and decided to focus on getting through that and hopefully someday he'd be able to use his power and save Georgie. That was all he cared about now.

Sally, the new probation worker, had informed them that since the wall had been cleaned of the graffiti, they were to put a fresh coat of paint on. It was easier to paint than the scrubbing had been, so it was easy enough for Bill to day dream as he worked. He could hear the others talking around him. Mike and Stan were talking about a book they had both read when they were in high school while Richie was teasing Eddie about the way he was holding his brush and insisting on showing him the proper way to do it. Ben, who the others had quickly found out was super obsessed with music, was singing softly to himself. Bill really hoped that he would eventually be at ease around them and would sing his heart out. He could just make out some of the lyrics, and he was trying to place what the song was, and then suddenly he felt as if he was being pulled through a wind tunnel. It felt exactly like it had the time he had turned back time after Eddie had been killed. He was scared that he was going to be dropped back there but instead he found himself in his kitchen at home and something was burning.

He didn't remember that.

He rushed over to the stove where there was a frying pan full of burnt French toast.

Wait. French toast.

"Oh man, is there going to be anything left for me to eat?" Georgie said as he made his way into the kitchen.

The spatula that Bill had been holding fell to the floor, clattering against the tile. He turned around, ran to Georgie, and hugged him.

"Uh, Bill, what's going on? You're acting like you didn't just see me a few minutes ago."

"It feels like it's been a year," Bill whispered as he started to cry. He wiped the tears away before he pulled back. "Georgie, you gotta tell me, are you really going to Steve's tonight?"

"Well, first off," Georgie said, and Bill could hear the eye roll in the tone of his voice. "Stop calling me Georgie. It's George. I'm not six anymore. And, uh, duh I'm going to Steve's. Where else would I be

going?"

"I don't know. Like a party or something? A rave?"

Georgie laughed.

"Bill, no one goes to raves anymore. Are raves even really a thing?"

"They were totally a thing. I mean, they could still be a thing. That's not important right now. The important thing is, you know you can tell me if you're going somewhere else, like a party. I won't be mad."

Georgie studied Bill for a moment, and he honestly looked worried for him.

"Bill, what's gotten into you? Don't you trust me?"

"Yeah, of course I do," Bill said, nodding. "But I also get that, you know, you're sixteen. You want to rebel. You want to have fun with your friends. You don't want your boring big brother getting in the way."

"Is this your quarter life crisis?" Georgie asked with another laugh, though he didn't seem amused. "You're already forgetting stuff, it seems. I'm fifteen."

"Yeah, yeah. I know. I'm sorry. I misspoke."

"Anyway, you know I don't like parties and stuff like that. Me and Steve are just going to play some games or watch a movie. Now..." Georgie picked up the frying pan and threw away the burnt food. "Is there still time for breakfast?"

"Actually, how about we play hooky today? I'll call off and we can go out to get breakfast. Have a fun day in, huh?"

Georgie put his hand up against Bill's forehead.

"No, seriously. Are you feeling alright."

"Not really," Bill said with a sigh.

After a moment, Georgie finally said, "Okay. Yeah. Let's play hooky today."

Bill made the call to the book shop as they got into his car. He drove them to a nearby diner that the whole family enjoyed. It was good, cheap food and they ordered nearly two meals for each of them. They shared their sides -- hash browns, corned beef hash, and sausage links being passed back and forth over their table. After they finished eating, they headed to the movie theater and saw some cheesy horror movie, whispering jokes to each other until the people in front of them turned around and rightfully shushed them. They ran out of the theater and walked to the arcade that was down the street and played House of the Dead II until closing time. Bill started to drive them home, and Georgie pointedly tapped his shoulder.

"This isn't the way to Steve's house."

"Hey, I thought we agreed we're playing hooky. That means from everything."

"I still want to go to Steve's. We don't get to hang out as much, anymore."

Bill kept driving toward their house.

"I'm sorry Georgie, but I really don't think you should go Steve's tonight."

"What the hell? This shit again?"

"Hey." Bill glanced over quickly, frowning at him. "Since when do you talk like that?"

"Since forever! I'm not a little kid anymore, Bill. I keep telling you! Don't call me Georgie." Each word of that last sentence was punctuated with a slap to the dashboard. Bill was so taken aback that he had to pull over. That didn't deter Georgie as he kept going. "Like, I'm sure you cursed at my age. I mean, I'm almost an adult, but you still protect me like I'm a little kid still. Don't treat me like I can't do things on my own. It's not my fault you don't have any of your own friends."

He gasped as if he couldn't believe that he had said that.

"No, don't worry," Bill said. "You're right. I do need to start treating you like the young man you're becoming. And it's not your fault. It's not my fault. Hell, it's not even Mom and Dad's fault. It's just... a combination of things."

"Yeah, I know that. And I'm sorry I said that. So, can we turn around now?"

"I still can't do that, Georgie. I'm sorry."

Georgie screamed in frustration and hit the dashboard again. He threw open the door and started storming off. Bill quickly grabbed the keys and ran after him. A few of the neighbors were hanging out on their porches or in their front yards, and watched as the two of them shouted.

"Georgie, no. Please get back here. I promise I'll explain everything, but you can't go to Steve's."

"Well, guess what, Bill? You're not my fucking dad, and this time I mean it."

Bill froze, unsure of how to respond to that. Unfortunately, he never got a chance to because he felt the world start to spin around him and he fell back in front of the community center. He looked around but didn't see the other six anywhere nearby. Had they finished painting while he had been back in the past? He ran inside to try and find them but there was still no one around. Maybe they were painting the other side now? He stuck his head out the back door and immediately sneezed.

Why were there flowers everywhere?

And was that somebody crying?

He walked out slowly and saw Richie standing in front of one of the larger bouquets as he cried softly.

"Richie?"

He jumped and nearly knocked Bill's head clean off.

"Oh, hey, sorry man. I didn't see you there." He wiped his face with the sleeve of his flannel although it was obvious Bill had seen the tears. And was that a black eye? His lip was swollen, too. "Do I, uh, know you?"

"Um, my parents know your parents?" Bill tried.

It seemed to be enough for Richie who nodded.

"Oh? Cool. Sorry that I didn't recognize you. It's, uh, been awhile since I've been to my parent's place."

"So, what happened here?"

A quiet sob escaped Richie.

"Uh, my friends were... they were killed." Bill could feel the blood drain from his face. "Yeah, we were doing community service and our probation worker just went crazy. He used a pipe and... I'm sorry. I can't talk about it. We'd only really known each other for a day, but... I felt like they were the closest friends I ever had. I know that makes no sense."

"No, it makes sense. I completely understand what you mean. I'm so sorry that happened to our... *your* friends." He found himself suddenly holding Richie as he started crying in earnest. Bill hugged him until he calmed down, pulling away with an apology. "Hey, never apologize for that. You clearly loved them a lot. You are alright, for right now?"

When Richie nodded, Bill said his goodbyes and then he ran.

He ran and ran and didn't stop until he got back to his house. He slumped down to the entryway floor and tried as hard as he could to turn back time once more, but he couldn't. Of course he couldn't. He still had no idea how it worked. He cried out, his hands tearing at his hair, as he slid even further down until he was laying on the floor. He hit his head against the wood several times before his mother came running into the entryway and pulled him up so that he was sitting against the wall.

"Bill, baby, what are you doing?" she asked.

"I fucked everything up, Mom. I fu-fucked it all up."

"Oh, no, honey, you didn't fuck anything up," his mother said as she hugged him to her chest. "I know it's been hard. We all miss Georgie, but you know known of us blame you, okay?"

Bill's head snapped up and he stared at her.

"Blame muh-me?"

"Well, I know the police had to interview since witnesses saw you fighting with Georgie, but you know your dad and me would *never* think for a second that you had anything to do with it. I'm going to keep telling you this as many times as it takes for you to open back up."

"They questioned me? But I wasn't arrested?"

"Oh honey. The therapist that we've been seeing did say that the stress might cause some memory loss. There's nothing wrong with that. No, of course you weren't arrested. They just questioned you but obviously couldn't find any evidence that you did anything because you didn't do anything. Georgie must be cooling off somewhere."

"Cooling off? But it's been... it's been almost a year."

"Well, the detective told us about how often boys like Georgie run away. I'm sure he'll come home soon."

How could this positive outlook be so much worse than the zombies his parents had become? And how he gave up all hope of searching for Georgie because of the fight? God, though neither of those was the worst part? Because he hadn't been there to warn Eddie to not open the door, the probation worker had managed to get in and kill all the others? Except Richie, but Bill couldn't even feel good that he had made it when he had managed to make everything worse than it had been to begin with.

God, he had to get back. He just had to.

And then he was no longer in the entryway with his mother. He was back in the kitchen again, the French toast just starting to burn.

Letting Georgie get onto that bus a second time was the hardest thing he ever had to do, but he did it.

There was no way he could go to work, though, so he still called off and found himself walking around town. As he passed certain places, he found himself jumping back and forth through time.

First it was the bowling alley.

Suddenly it was night time and he saw Richie making his way in, juggling a giant bowling ball bag. Well, this Bill *had* to see.

He followed Richie into the bowling alley, unfortunately having to pay for admission just to sit at the bar and watch Richie and his friends bowl. The other three guys didn't seem to be having as nearly as much fun as Richie was. He was putting on a performance each time he went up, jumping and cheering even though his ball ended up in the gutter more often than not. And he kept going for it, too, even though his friends started ignoring him by the third turn. Once the game was over, Richie said something that Bill couldn't quite make out and then ditched his friends. Bill couldn't help but be proud of him. They had been treating him like garbage, honestly. Sure, Richie could be a little annoying at times with his constant jokes, but that didn't give them the right to act the way they had.

But then Richie started eating the penny candy that was available for purchase to the side of the bar with no clear intention of paying for it. Bill had to admit that was a dick move. It wasn't long before the manager was coming over and yelling at Richie that he was going to have to pay for it. He was getting perhaps a little too aggressive, which only spurred Richie on, and then in the blink of an eye, Richie was running down the lanes, slipping and sliding across the floor. The manager hesitated for a moment before he went running after him, but he wasn't fast enough. There was no way he was going to catch him, and yet Richie still went diving toward the pins. Was he seriously trying to crawl up into the collection area? This strategy didn't pay off, as the manager grabbed Richie's leg and pulled him back out before marching him into the bowling alley's office.

Well, things were getting a little too messy for Bill. He ducked out, but he couldn't stop laughing. He couldn't wait to tell everyone that Richie *did* technically get arrested for eating penny candy.

The second time happened to him halfway down the block from the bowling alley and Bill found himself coming too behind a newspaper stand. He looked over the top and gasped when he saw Eddie laying on the ground. There was already a bruise forming on his jaw and he had his arms protectively covering his head as a man kicked him repeatedly in the stomach. Bill could just make out the slurs the man was grunting as his foot came down on Eddie again and again. He wanted nothing more than to rush over and help Eddie, but he was worried about changing the past now. What if saving him from the fight somehow made things worse? But then again, he couldn't take listening to him cry out in pain. Bill was just about to run over when Eddie forced himself up and, oh my God. Did he seriously head butt the guy in the groin?

He *had*.

It caught the guy off guard and gave Eddie enough time to get to his feet. And then he was punching the guy, blood spurting from his nose and getting all over Eddie's shirt. He was really fucking the guy up and, while Bill couldn't argue with the community service Eddie ended up with, he was so incredibly proud of him for standing up for himself.

The third time led him to another fight and this time he didn't hesitate to run to help. Mike was surrounded by four men who were closing in on him. Bill pulled one of them back by the collar of his shirt and decked him. He went down and when Bill turned around, he saw a second one was already knocked out as well. Mike was holding his own against the third, but the fourth had wiped away blood that had been dripping into his eyes and was coming for him. Bill kicked his legs out from under him, but it caused him to fall back as well. All he could see was stars for a moment and then he felt someone helping him up.

"Hey, man, thanks for the help, but the police are coming," Mike said. "You go. You don't deserve to get caught up in all of this. I'll take care of it."

"I can't leave you alone. Not with police even."

Mike smiled softly at him, his hand cupping Bill's cheek.

"I appreciate that. But you should go get your head checked out. I'll be fine, I promise."

Bill was going to insist he stay to help, but he found himself traveling through time once more, and really? This was starting to get annoying. He *had* to figure out how to control this. For a moment he thought he had finally made it back to present time, because he was still where the fight with Mike had been, but then he saw Ben walking by carrying a large duffel bag.

Bill followed him, staying about a block behind so Ben wouldn't notice him. He led them through down town until they reached a part of town that was purely residential. Ben eventually stopped in front of a small house, hiding behind a bush in the front yard. He unzipped the duffel bag and pulled out a few things. Bill couldn't quite make out what they all were, but there was no mistaking the smell of gasoline when Ben opened the bottle.

What the hell was he doing?

Bill watched, frozen in fear, as Ben drenched a rag in the gasoline and lit it on fire. He walked over to the front door and opened the mail slot before he shook his head. He dropped the rag to the ground and stomped it out, but not before some sparks had flown over to the bush. It started burning and Ben started to freak out. He pulled out his phone and started yelling about the fire. Lights went on in the house and two people came out.

"Is that... Piggy, really?" one of the guys asked. "What the fuck are you doing, Piggy? Did you start that fire?"

Holy shit. No wonder he had never told them what he had done to get community service. Odd that Bev got the fire powers and not him.

Oh no. Bill didn't think he could stand if he had to see Bev. She hadn't explicitly told them the reason that she had attacked her father, but Bill was able to read between the lines. It had been

difficult enough hearing those guys called Eddie and Mike those hateful words. He didn't think he could stand to watch *that* He was pretty damn sure that he would kill the man before Bev even laid a hand on him, which would feel pretty damn awesome at first, but that would definitely mess up the present. He thought almost being thrown into jail was bad, imagine what actually being thrown into jail would be like? And then, of course, that would lead to the exact same outcome at the community center. He couldn't do that to his friends.

When he blinked and saw that he was standing in front of a synagogue, he let out a relieved sigh. Maybe he was finally learning to control it somewhat. There wasn't time to dwell on that, however, because Stan was coming out of the front door, and he looked absolutely pissed.

It took Bill a moment to notice the ax he was holding. His hands looked pretty cut up, and Bill could see Stan breaking a glass panel that once said 'Break in Case of Emergency' in order to get it. He watched as Stan walked over and just started going at it. The front of the building was made of brick, of course, but Bill could still see bits of the brick breaking off. The clang of the ax was the most grating noise that he had ever heard, though. He had to cover his ears with his hands, and so he didn't hear Stan's father yelling at first.

"Son, what are you doing? Stop this right now."

"Why should I? You care more about all of this than me," Stan said. His hands shook, but he still held the ax firmly. He wasn't poised to attack, and Bill knew he didn't, but he still looked threatening. "You act like my religion isn't important to me as well, but it is. It's so important, but this part of me that you hate so much is also important."

"That isn't who you are, son. We can help you."

"I don't need help!" Stan yelled. "I'm bisexual, Dad. And there's nothing wrong with that!"

"Don't say that word, Stanley. Listen, put the ax down. We'll forget this happened, we'll get you help, and we can put this all behind us."

Stan let the head of the ax drop to the ground but *still* holding on tightly to the handle. He looked like he wanted to believe his father but knew better.

"And if I refuse?"

Stan's father sighed.

"I'll... I'll have to call the police. I can't let you get away with this," he said, gesturing to the wall. The chips were so small, they'd be barely noticeable unless you were looking for them. "I'll have to press charges. Maybe then you'll see what this is doing to you, son."

"Alright. Fine." Stan's father smiled, and then screamed as Stan picked up the ax and started striking the wall again. "Call the fucking police, Dad! Because I'm not going anywhere!"

And then Bill found himself back at the community center. His paintbrush fell to the ground with a splat. Everyone turned toward him, asking if he was alright, and he simply asked, "Ben, are you singing New Kids on the Block?"

"Um, yeah?" Ben said cautiously. "Is that what was bothering you?"

"No!" Bill said quickly. "You have a great voice. You should sing a little louder for us."

"Wow. I can't believe Ben wooed Big Bill so well, he dropped his brush," Richie said. "Now I have paint all over my pants, dick."

"You had paint on your pants since the first day," Eddie pointed out. "So *you're* the dick."

Richie and Eddie got into it then, with Stan occasionally telling them to shut up, and everything was back to normal. God, the day had been draining, but then Bill supposed it would be since he had lived through probably seven days in the last 24 hours. He wanted to drag himself home, crawl into bed, and sleep for the next week, but unfortunately there was still work to be done. The white paint was so bright that he felt like he was being blinded. He pushed his way through it, though, and was so happy when it was time to get changed and head home.

Stan, Bev, and Ben headed out first, agreeing to grab a drink together. Richie followed Eddie out next, like a lost puppy, and Bill thought Mike left after that. He was taking longer than usual to change since he was so exhausted, but he still had enough energy to jump when Mike snuck up behind him.

"Sorry, Bill. I didn't mean to scare you. Especially when you might have a concussion. Did you end up getting your head checked out?"

"My what?" Bill asked, and then it dawned on him. He was technically in a new timeline. "Oh God. You... you remember?"

"Yeah. And thank you again. For helping me out." Mike leaned against the locker next to Bill's, and it almost felt like he was in high school again. Not like many guys were leaning against lockers and talking to him in high school, but still. "Apparently it was inevitable I get community service, but I think I'm alright with that. I get to see my hero, after all."

Bill gulped. Holy shit. Mike was *smooth*.

"Hey, it was all you, man. I just helped."

"If you insist. So, how about I take you out... to the hospital?"

Bill laughed and, he hated to admit it, but his head *did* hurt.

"Uh, yeah. That actually sounds like a good idea."

So, first date at a hospital? Well, it was different at least.

4. Episode Four

Summary for the Chapter:

"Ben here is a volunteer at the shelter, and he's going to be overseeing you, so you don't have to worry if you aren't entirely sure [what to do]. Please make him feel welcome here. That means no shenanigans," [Sally said].

That last part was directed directly at Richie, which none of them were surprised about that.

"I cannot promise anything," Richie said, causing Stan to groan.

Sally sighed, clearly already fed up with Richie's nonsense, which Ben couldn't blame her.

[...]

"Does anyone have any questions?" [The Other Ben asked].

Richie raised his hand, which the six of them had quickly learned meant they were in for something absolutely ridiculous.

"Yes?" The Other Ben asked, unaware of what he was about to get himself into.

"If a bear and a shark were to have a fight, who would win?"

"If you've got any relevant questions, just ask."

Notes for the Chapter:

this one was tough because there's so much that's just exposition and then a rush of a little plot at the end i'm so sorry i wished i could do ben better i'm sorry

"That is a giant pile of clothes," Stan said as they all piled into the community center that day.

"No, Stan the man," Richie said. "That is a fucking *mountain* of clothes. Did they use a dump truck to get it in here?"

"You should just be thankful that you didn't have to bring the clothes in," Sally said, appearing seemingly out of nowhere, with a man in tow. Richie screamed and clutched onto Eddie's arm. "These clothes are being donated to a local homeless shelter. Now, our neighbors decided that a clothing drive meant they could just throw everything into a garbage bag and dump it at the shelter, so you're going to all be going through the clothes and finding what is suitable to donate and what will be recycled. Ben here is a volunteer at the shelter, and he's going to be overseeing you, so you don't have to worry if you aren't entirely sure if it belongs in Pile A or Pile B. Please make him feel welcome here. That means no shenanigans."

That last part was directed directly at Richie, which none of them were surprised about that.

"I cannot promise anything," Richie said, causing Stan to groan.

Sally sighed, clearly already fed up with Richie's nonsense, which Ben couldn't blame her. He loved his new friends, don't get him wrong, but he could understand how Richie managed to get on everyone else's nerves. The Other Ben didn't seem fazed, however. He was smiling the entire time he walked them through what it was exactly what they were looking for -- and what they weren't. Obviously anything that was damaged beyond repair made it into Pile B. They also were to toss aside anything that was impractical, like high heels or dresses with trains. (Who even still had dresses with trains other than wedding dresses?) These were for people who lived a tough lifestyle, and they needed to focus on making their lives easy.

"Does anyone have any questions?"

Richie raised his hand, which the six of them had quickly learned meant they were in for something absolutely ridiculous.

"Yes?" The Other Ben asked, unaware of what he was about to get himself into.

"If a bear and a shark were to have a fight, who would win?"

"If you've got any relevant questions, just ask," The Other Ben said. Eddie laughed, looking far too pleased that Richie had been knocked down a peg. But The Other Ben was still smiling as he added, "And if it's on dry land, I'd bet on the bear."

Everyone laughed at that, then. Especially Bev, which Ben didn't want to let it get to him, but he couldn't help it. He wished that he could make her laugh like that, but he never was and never would be the funny guy.

He tried to forget about it as the seven of them sat down on the floor, to make things easier for themselves, and started sifting through the mountain of clothes. Richie immediately started putting on whatever he had found that he thought was funny. It had barely been five minutes, and when Ben looked over, he was wearing what looked like snow boarding goggles.

"Hey, Eddie. Eddie. Eds. Hey, look over here."

"Jesus Richie. I saw the fucking goggles. Can you calm down?"

Bev and Mike laughed at the two of them and started talking about which of the clothes they would wear.

"Do you think we could take some of the recycle pile home?" Mike asked. "Because I really like these overalls."

"I mean, that is the definition of recycle," Stan said, "but those overalls are definitely going into the keep pile. They're in great condition."

"Hey Richie?" Mike asked, turning to the goofball who was in the middle of lacing up some roller skates. "Do you think you could rip these for me?"

"Absolutely, my man."

"Don't encourage him!" Eddie yelled. "What are you all doing?"

"Oh, come on. Live a little," Bev said. "I mean, I can't *not* try on these shoes."

Ben may have been biased because he thought Bev was pretty even in the orange coveralls they had to wear for community service, but she looked beautiful in the red, sparkly high heels she had tried on.

"They do look amazing," he said, quietly, but thankfully Bev heard him. She smiled at him and gave him a wink.

Unfortunately, The Other Ben chose that moment to walk by and check in on them.

"How's everything going guys?"

"I'm thinking I look like a rock star," Richie replied. "What do you think?"

He struck a pose, one arm extended as if he was reaching for something far away, the other grabbing his hair. He was still wearing the snow boarding goggles and roller skates, and he had also added a bright purple lacy bra and a headband that gave him ladybug antenna.

The Other Ben ignored him, which seemed to be working in his favor when it came to dealing with Richie's personality. He turned his attention to the rest of them, and Mike asked about keeping anything they wanted in Pile B, which The Other Ben said was perfectly fine. With that out of the way, Bill and Stan told him that they were alright, while Eddie blushed and told him that he was doing great. If Ben thought he was jealous of the attention Bev was giving him, and getting in return, Richie looked like he was going to burst.

And Ben could tell that through the goggles and everything.

The Other Ben didn't seem to care about having Eddie's attention. He

was completely focused on Bev. So, he simply brushed Eddie off and made his way over to Bev.

"Those look fantastic on you," he said, pointing to the high heels she was still wearing.

"Oh, thank you. And now since I know we can keep some stuff, I might take them. Though I don't really have anywhere to wear them."

"Well, I could always take you out for a drink sometime?"

Ben could not believe what he was hearing. Who did this guy think he was? That was insanely inappropriate to ask that when he was in a position of power over her. Thankfully Bev politely told him that she wasn't interested, and The Other Ben left the room with his tail tucked between his legs.

"What is it about that guy, that you're all throwing yourselves at him?" Richie asked. "I don't get it."

"Wh-what?" Eddie spluttered. "I wasn't throwing myself at him!"

"Yeah, there was definitely no throwing happening," Bev said, resting her hand on Eddie's shoulder. He still looked like he would be steaming if he was a cartoon character. And Richie would be the cartoon character that had melted into a puddle. Actually, Ben couldn't find him in the mountain of clothes anymore. "Besides, you say 'all' like the rest of the guys are interested."

"I mean, I *do* have to admit that he's cute," Stan said.

"Oh no. Not you too!"

"I said I wasn't throwing myself at him!" Eddie yelled.

"Mike? Bill? Please tell me you can talk some sense into Richie," Bev said.

"Yeah, Richie, don't worry about it," Bill said. "There's nothing special about that guy. He's got nothing on you."

"I mean, he's just not my type," Mike added, sneaking a glance at Bill, and well. That was interesting. "But yeah. You're obviously way cooler."

"Are you guys seriously ganging up on me and trying to make me 'throw myself' at Richie?" Eddie asked. "Because the only reason I'd be throwing myself at him would be in order to punch him."

"You wouldn't be able to," Richie said, finally emerging from where he had been buried. "I'm faster than you, tiny. I'd dash away before you even got close. Wait! I'd skate away! I almost forgot what I was wearing."

Richie struggled to get to his feet on the roller skates, but once he was stable, he skated off. Eddie ran after him, yelling that there was no way he was letting him get off from doing work. Now that the first person had ditched, Mike gave Bill a look, and they wandered off as well. Stan was sequestered off to the one side where he was still attempting to go through the clothes, so that left Ben with Bev. This was the first time where it really was just the two of them, and it was his chance to talk to her on a more personal level.

"So, Bev, is red your favorite color, then?"

Wow. *So* personal. What kind of question was that? Bev was going to think he was just an immature child.

"I, uh, I don't think I've really ever thought about it," Bev said after a moment. "I guess I like the red of these shoes. I can do that now. Pick out what *I* like."

"Oh yeah? That's great. We can look through and find some other stuff that's your style that you can take home, if you want?"

"I'd like that. that'll be fun."

They ended up wearing more of the clothing than Richie had on, who returned eventually with Eddie hot on his tail, as they talked about anything and everything. Bev opened up a little bit about how life

had been with her father and how, in a weird way, the restraining order he ended up getting against her was a blessing. Now that she was living with her aunt, she was able to truly live her life and figure out what it was she liked. In fact, going through the clothing, she kept setting aside ripped shirts that she thought she would be able to stitch together to make something new.

"I bet someday, you're going to be a super famous designer," Ben said once Bev had set aside the fifth piece of clothing.

"I don't know about famous, but it *would* be pretty cool to be a designer. I definitely like doing it, at least," Bev said, and Ben could hear the confidence in her voice, even if she didn't know it was there herself. "Hey, if you see anything you want me to fix for you, you can put it in the pile too. It'd be good for me to get the practice, right?"

Ben blushed. That was honestly the nicest thing anyone had ever offered to do for him.

"Of course. I'd love to have something made by you."

"So, what about you Ben? What do you like to do?"

"Oh, well, I'm studying to be an architect, and I do really like it. But in a perfect world, um, I'd love to publish my poetry."

Bev was about to reply, but that's when Mike and Bill finally returned, and Bill said, "Oh, you write too?"

Ben looked up and gasped. He tried to hide how shocked he was, but it was pretty difficult. Bill's hair was sticking up all over the place and his face was flushed. Mike looked a little more put together, but he looked smug, which was probably worse. There was no denying what it was that they had been up to. Where had they even gone to do it? God, Ben hoped that it wasn't the locker room. A little bit because he didn't want to have to get changed where his friends had just had sex, but surprisingly it was mostly because there was no way that could have been comfortable.

"Uh, yeah. Just a little bit, though," Ben said, but Bill probably didn't

hear him over Richie's wolf whistle as he skated into the room.

"Damn, guys. Really?" he asked. Eddie came in, grumbling behind him, and flicked his nose. "We've only been here how many days? You work fast. But seriously. Congrats on the sex, you two."

Bill retreated in on himself, obviously embarrassed about it being so obvious. Ben felt bad for him. There was something about keeping the intimacy between you and your partner, he thought, that was important.

"Hey, shut up Richie," Mike said as he put his arm around Bill. He didn't sound angry, but there was no argument in his tone. He was still serious. "Yes, Bill and I are together now. I'd appreciate it if you don't joke about it."

"I mean, that wasn't a joke. Like, seriously, good for you. But fine. I guess I'll just go back to..." He threw himself over the pile of clothes he had been working on earlier and pinched Eddie's cheek. "...bugging my Eddie Spaghetti."

"Oh my God, no," Eddie said, disgusted. "Do *not* call me that."

"Hey, Ben," Bev said, pulling him back into the conversation. "Want to take a smoke break with me?"

"Oh, I don't smoke," Ben said, but Bev was already taking his head and leading him out of the community center.

Ben could just make out Richie yelling after them, "What about me? I actually smoke!"

"I'll stand away enough so you won't get smoke in you face," Bev said. She pulled a packet of cigarettes out of her pocket, looked around to make sure they were alone, and quickly lit one with the tip of her finger. "I have to admit, it's nice not having to keep track of my lighter anymore."

"That is one way to look at it," Ben mumbled. He couldn't think of any positive outcome for the power he had gotten stuck with. "Um,

but why did you ask me to come with you?"

"There's seven of us, and it can get hectic. This way we can talk. Just the two of us. So, you were saying? About your poetry?"

"Oh, well, I mean... There's not much else to say. It's just something I've been doing since I was a kid."

Bev tapped her cigarette over the railing, and Ben watched as the ash drifted off with the wind.

"Well, I would love to read some. I mean, if you're alright with that."

Normally, Ben would *not* be alright with that. He had *never* let anyone read any of his poetry. He was so self conscious about his writing, but if he could pick someone that he would let read it, he think it would be Bev. He knew that she would be honest, and not simply tell him it was good to save his feelings, but that she wouldn't be cruel about it either. Of course, the best case scenario would be that Bev loved it, but even worst case, Ben had some critiques he could work with. He never had that before, and if he ever wanted to grow as a writer, he knew that was vital.

"Uh, yeah. I could look through my pieces tonight and bring some in tomorrow."

"Awesome. Now, let's get back. You..." She pointed at Ben with the tail end of her cigarette before dropping it and putting it out with the toe of the red high heels. "...still need to pick out some clothes you want me to alter."

They headed back inside and helped the rest of the losers finish up with the last of the clothes. There were two small piles remaining, so the time went by quickly. The Other Ben came by to check on them one last time and then he came back with bags so they could start getting the clothes ready to be taken to the homeless shelter. Everything that they had set aside to keep for themselves, they ended up having to juggle as they carried it to the locker room themselves. Luckily Bev, who had the most, had brought a back pack. The rest of them decided to leave what they had in their lockers so they could

bring a back pack themselves the next day. Stan was the only one who hadn't saved anything, so he was the first to open his locker, and his gasp caused everyone to turn to him.

"Richie, was this you?" Stan demanded. He ripped something off of his locker door, holding it up to Richie's face. "Because this isn't fucking funny."

"What is that? I can't fucking see it if you're shoving it in my face," Richie said. He grabbed it from Stan and started reading it out loud. "I know what you did.' What the hell does that mean?"

"I think that's a little obvious," Eddie said, rolling his eyes. "Someone knows we killed..."

"Dude, shut the fuck up," Stan hissed through his teeth.

"That we killed the probation worker," Eddie finished, lowering his voice.

"Okay, well, this is a stupid joke then. If I was going to prank you guys, I'd be a little more original," Richie said. He lowered and warbled his voice, like a horror movie trailer voice over. "I know what you did last summer."

"Okay, then if it wasn't Richie, that means someone really does know what we did," Bill said. "We have to do something about this."

"Hey, I don't think we should panic," Mike said. "If they really knew what we did, they wouldn't be leaving a note."

"Mike has a point," Bev said. "If they had any actual evidence, they would have gone to the police. Especially since the police *are* looking into Tony and Gary's disappearance."

"Honestly, I doubt the police are even doing much," Bill mumbled.

Bill would know, Ben thought. He had first hand experience with how the police handled, or rather didn't handle, missing person cases. Plus, there was the fact that Sally seemed frustrated that the police

never did come that day to interview them since they had been the last ones to see the two of them. They probably were in the clear, but Ben was starting to feel like he had made the right choice to think about a Plan B in case something like this happened. That evening when they had wheeled the bodies to the underpass and buried them, Ben had thought to grab Tony's wallet that had been sticking out of his pocket. It was sitting on his desk at home. He obviously wasn't going to use his cards for personal reasons, but he had thought it might come in handy. In case Tony had to disappear.

He was about to tell them about his plan, but Richie had started ranting again.

"Right? All of this is ridiculous. We shouldn't even be giving it a second thought." He took the note and ripped it up into little pieces. Eddie and Stan were chiding him for getting it all over the floor because now they had to clean it up so no one else found it. "Like, we just had a great day. Nothing weird happened. We got some free shit. Mike and Bill boned. We should be celebrating! So forget that stupid note, and let's get going guys!"

He twirled his fingers in a circle, indicating they should hurry up. Stan didn't seem entirely happy about brushing the note under the carpet, so to speak, but eventually he ended up following the rest of them as they made their way to the neighborhood bar.

"Did you want to come with us?" Bev asked, stalling in the doorway.

"No thanks," Ben said quietly. "I have something I have to take care of tonight. Next time, though. But I'll definitely have some poetry for you to read tomorrow. Promise."

"Okay, I am going to hold you to it. For both of those."

Ben finished up getting changed and then made his way out of the community center. He waved at Sally as he passed. She was frowning, and he could only imagine how tough it was when someone you worked closely with went missing. He wished he could do something to make her feel better. Hopefully what he had planned would do just that. Ben understood how important closure could be.

Sally did smile slightly at him and waved back, at least. Ben had to pass the popular drinking spot to get to his house. It wasn't the best bar in town, and it definitely wasn't *the* only bar in town, but it had good prices and it was small enough that it was easy to hold a conversation without yelling. It was definitely where the others had gone to for their drinks, and Ben was nervous about them seeing him. Obviously, having walked home together after community service several times already, they knew that was the way he had to walk. He still didn't want to have to talk to them again. If he didn't get home then he would lose the courage to do what he had to. It sounded like a seamless plan, but of course there was this little voice in the back of his head telling him that it was probably too dangerous for him to pull it off.

He made it home without anyone noticing, sat down at his desk, and booted up his computer. He played with Tony's wallet where it sat, opening and closing it with one finger. He knew that he had to make it so the police and Sally and everyone thought that Tony and Gary had simply decided to move away without notice. But where exactly should he have them go that was believable? It wasn't like he had talked to Tony enough to know where he would run away to if he were to ever run away. Ben thought about where he'd like to go, and he realized that he didn't really know that much about the rest of the world. He had always loved reading about the history of their town, but all of his knowledge was limited to Derry.

He ended up looking up the most popular vacation destinations and picking the fourth one down the list so it wasn't super obvious that was what was done. He took one of Tony's credit cards and paid for two one way tickets to said destination. He also bought several suitcases and some other supplies he figured two men stating their new life together might need. He let out a huge sigh of relief once that was taken care of, setting aside Tony's wallet in case he would need to use it again to further sell the story he had concocted.

It only took a matter of ten or fifteen minutes, so Ben could have joined the others for a drink. It wasn't as if he hadn't gone out with them once before, but he still felt as if they simply invited him to be polite. He liked the others. He wanted them to be his friends, but he knew that it was going to take more than a week of cleaning and

painting for them to like him. He knew it was his own fault. He was too quiet and he was a nerd. It was hard to make his mark with the other six, who were all big personalities, but he was going to work on it.

Just not that night. He was rattled from what he had done. He would say that it was because he had never broke the law before, but technically he did. Well, he had gotten drunk and had been planning to. The actual damage was completely accidental, so it's not like he was actually a criminal.

No, he was going to stay in his comfort zone. Talk to the people he knew weren't going to judge him for things like being quiet or overweight or not being funny enough. He logged onto the blogging site he had been using recently. It had started as a place to share his thoughts on history books he had read, but since he had started his community service, he wrote a lot about what they were doing. Some may say that he was laying it on thick, about how it felt good to give back to the community, but he *was* genuinely enjoying it. Before things had gotten out of hands with his fellow students at school, he had volunteered at the library constantly. This was truly something he loved to do, and while it wasn't good that he had been arrested, he had to admit that this was the best possible outcome that could have happened.

There was several new comments on his blog, so he decided to check those first before he wrote his entry for the day. There were a few from his mutuals and one or two from usernames he recognized who had been commenting since he had started community service. Most of them, however, were from a new person who's username he didn't recognize.

ShyGirl97She had gone back and commented on so many entries. She had nearly gone back an entire year. She was offering wonderful words of encouragement when it came to the work that he and the other losers were doing, but she also had an opinion on pretty much every book that he had posted about. She seemed to agree with most of what he had to say, but there were a few instances where she disagreed. However, unlike most people on the internet, she didn't post any hate. It seemed as if she was trying to open a discussion

with him about it. Whether to try and sway his opinion, or maybe she was open minded and wanted to see why it was he exactly thought a certain way. It was honestly the best thing he could have come home to.

He started replying to each comment when he noticed that the little green dot that indicated she was online had popped up. It was actually *out* of his comfort zone to initiate a one on one conversation himself, so he had no idea where the need to do so came from. He thought he was going to spend the rest of the night being safe, but after taking a deep breath, he clicked on the link she he could send her a direct message.

HistoricalDerry: hey ShyGirl97! thank you so much for all your comments! that was an awesome end to my day

ShyGirl97: of course! you're a really amazing writer and have super interesting ideas about everything!

HistoricalDerry: oh wow! thank you so much!

Ben could feel himself blushing. He had never thought about his blog posts as 'writing' exactly. Not like his poetry, and it was great to hear that they made a great read.

Oh. His poetry. He was supposed to find some pieces to show to Bev the next day. He knew he should get up and do that before he was too tired, but at that moment, his computer dinged with a new message

ShyGirl97: you're welcome! i see you've only responded to the first ten so would you like to just talk about the rest now?

Ben's fingers hesitated over the keyboard, thinking about his choices. He knew Bev wouldn't be upset if he told her that what he had planned to do that night took too long and he'd have to go through his poetry another time. Sure, he had promised that he was going to bring some, and he definitely still was going to. She would absolutely understand that. But she was a real person, a real friend, that Ben knew. ShyGirl97 was just a faceless person behind a screen who had

commented on Ben's blog. But that meant it was easier for him to have a full conversation. True, he had managed to make time to talk to Bev that day, which had been absolutely amazing, but he had been slightly freaking out the entire time. That's just who he was as a person.

So talking to ShyGirl97 would be like practice, right? It was the logical choice.

HistoricalDerry: yeah! that would be awesome! where would you like to start?

Ben was the last to arrive the next day. He had stayed up until nearly one in the morning talking to ShyGirl97 and had trouble waking up, despite always setting several alarms. He may have been a little paranoid about sleeping in, but now he had the proof that he wasn't worrying about nothing. He rubbed his eyes and yawned as he shuffled to his locker. Richie and Eddie were already bickering, Stan had his hands planted firmly over his ears in an attempt to block them out, and Mike, Bill, and Bev were nowhere to be seen.

"Bev's out having a smoke," Richie said, suddenly, startling Ben. "I saw you looking lost, kid. You should go out and talk to her."

"Like you're one to offer relationship advice of any kind," Stan mumbled.

Richie seemed speechless for a moment, trying to come up with a response, and Eddie groaned before shoving his shoulder.

"I do *not* 'worship' you. God, you're so full of yourself."

"Get out of my head!" Richie yelled. He turned back to Ben, trying to act cool. "Well, if you believe these two that I'm no good at relationship advice, you should totally go find Mike and Bill and ask them. Though, I'd be careful if I were you. I heard some pretty, uh, *intense* noises coming from the store room."

"God, you're disgusting," Stan said.

"How am I the disgusting one? They're the two going at it in the fucking store room! How is this in any way my fault?"

The two of them continued arguing about it as they and Eddie left the locker room. Ben had managed to go through the whole conversation without saying one word, which honestly wasn't that strange, but for once he wasn't worried about it. He wasn't sure if he was awake enough to string two words together. Once he got changed into his coveralls, he made his way to the small kitchenette and poured himself a cup of coffee. He wasn't much of a coffee drinker, so he put a decent amount of cream and sugar in before taking a sip.

"You know, too much sugar ruins the taste," Bev said from behind him, sending Ben jumping for the second time that morning. "Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Richie said you were looking for me."

Now Ben wasn't a violent person, despite far too much evidence suggesting otherwise, but he was going to punch Richie next time he saw him.

"Oh no. Richie's just being Richie. I only just got here. It's been a long morning already."

"Up all night writing?" Bev asked as she poured some coffee for herself. Ben noted that she took it black with one sugar. "You didn't have to write something new, you know. I'd be happy looking at old stuff."

Oh yeah. Again. The poetry.

Ben had completely forgot. What was the excuse he had come up with again? He was too tired to remember.

"I'm sorry. The thing I had to do last night went so long that I didn't have time to go through them. But I did mentally bookmark..." He tapped the side of his head with his Styrofoam cup. "...some pieces. And I will go through and bring those tomorrow. I promise."

Ben didn't want to get his hopes up, but it looked like Bev was

disappointed.

"That's alright. I understand that life can get busy. Whenever you have time, honestly. No rush." She finished the rest of her coffee rather fast considering how hot it was and threw her cup in the trash. "Probably best we join the others. Don't want to get on the probation worker's bad side."

The Other Ben was there with Sally and tables full of dishes and cups. Once again, they were to sort through everything to see what was usable or not, and it would be shipped off to the homeless shelter to use in their kitchen. The Other Ben mentioned how they had to work a little faster than they did the day before because he had to take a longer route than usual to get to the shelter before it closed since there was work being done on the overpass. Ben looked around at the rest of losers and cursed under his breath at how bad most of them were at hiding their shock. Thankfully, The Other Ben seemed focused making heart eyes at Bev who had the best poker face. Even if that made Ben's jealousy flare up. Now that they had their instructions, he left them to it, and immediately Bill gathered them into a circle.

"We have to do something," he said. "If they dig up the bodies..."

"Don't fucking say that," Stan said, his hands fisted in his hair. "They're not... They *can't*..."

"Calm down Stanny," Richie said. "This is easily solved. We just head on over, get them before the crews start working, and we dump them in the lake."

"And how are we going to do that, smart ass?" Eddie asked. "We can't use the wheelchairs now. It'll be kind of obvious that they're dead."

"We use a car."

"Do any of us *have* a car?" Stan asked. Everyone shook their head. "So, yeah, brilliant idea Richie."

"We'll use the probation worker's car." That got him a well earned glare. "What? She'll be busy dealing with Mr. Dreamy. She won't even

notice that it's gone. We'll be back in no time."

"You *do* remember how long it took to dig those graves, right?" Mike asked.

"Well, then, we'll just have to be fast, won't we? We'll bring them back here and store them in the freezer until later tonight and when it's dark, then we can use the wheelchairs, and no one will be the wiser. I think it's the best we can do. Does anyone else have a better idea?"

It was quiet for a moment. Stan started cursing and Mike shook his head.

"I guess not," Bev muttered.

"Alright. Let's do this, then," Bill said.

Richie was elected to be the one to go into the office and grab Sally's keys while she was busy talking to The Other Ben. They drove out to the overpass and dug until all of their palms were bleeding. They got Tony and Gary's bodies into the trunk of the car and drove back to the community center. Mike, Bill, and Stan went to carry in Tony first while Ben and Richie were to watch the car and Eddie to watch the street. It looked as if they were going to make it without any problems, and then Ben saw Sally leaving the community center. He quickly pulled Richie behind a nearby tree.

"What do we do?" he asked. "We can't let her leave with the car."

"Hey, it's alright buddy," Richie said, patting his back. "I got this."

Richie picked up a rock that was near their feet and went running. Ben tried to call out to him, but it was too late. He threw the rock right at the windshield just as Sally was about to open the door.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" she screamed. "Are you mentally deficient?"

Ben winced at her choice of words. Richie, on the other hand, didn't seem to be affected in the least.

"If I was mentally deficient, I would have missed," he said, like it was quite the 'gotcha' moment.

Sally stalked over, grabbing Richie's arm, and leading him back into the community center. Just as the front door slammed behind them, Mike, Bill, and Stan returned to grab Gary next. Ben waved to them from behind the three when they were surprised to not see him there.

"There, uh, was a little problem with the probation worker, but Richie took care of it," he explained.

Stan groaned when he saw the rock lodged in the windshield. There was no time to worry about it, however, so they quickly grabbed Gary's body, and Ben joined Eddie to watch the street. Soon enough, they were done. They walked back into the center to only be met with Sally tapping her foot impatiently. They all got into trouble for ditching, but thankfully she didn't seem to care what the reason was. Their only punishment was to stay and finish sorting the dishes even though it was almost time for them to go. It wasn't exactly a problem for them, since they were all going to have to sneak back in later anyway, and Bill and Richie had already called off from their jobs earlier. The Other Ben also stopped by to tell them he was disappointed that he wouldn't be able to deliver the donations to the shelter that night, but at that point they were all too tired to care about his supposedly motivational speech.

By the time they had finished sorting through everything, it was nearly eight. It was dark enough that they had no problem wheeling Tony and Gary the few blocks to the river bank where Mike had a boat docked. In an effort to lighten the mood, he told them about how he came to row down the river with his grandfather once a week when the weather was nicer. Ben tried to listen to the story, but it was hard to with two decomposing bodies in the boat with them. Also, with Richie munching loudly on an ice cream cone he had found in the freezer where they had stashed the bodies. Eddie made sure to lecture him on how many germs he was probably ingesting,. which only seemed to make everyone other than Richie feel sick.

Once they had made it to about the middle of the river, they tossed the weighed down bodies overboard.

"So, that's it then?" Bev asked. "We should be safe?"

"They're still going to be looking into them as missing persons," Stan said quietly, glancing over at Bill.

"Um, they might not," Ben said, and then explained what he had done the night before.

"Holy shit, that's fucking brilliant man," Richie said, saluting him with the hand that still held the ice cream. Some melted and dripped down his face. Eddie gagged. "It's always the quiet ones you have to look out for."

"I don't think that..." Ben started, but Richie kept talking over him.

"Okay, so we *are* in the clear. But you guys still all have powers, and I don't. I just want it on record that this is fucking bullshit. How come I don't have a power?"

"Because the universe knew that would be a fucking disaster?" Eddie suggested.

Richie tried to hit him, but Eddie moved away fast enough that he missed. He stuck his tongue out at Richie as the rest of them yelled at him for rocking the boat. Literally.

They rowed back to shore and, with a quick goodnight, went their separate ways. Ben trudged home, booting up his computer as he changed into his pajamas. It had been another long night, and his entire sleeping schedule was thrown off for sure, so a few more minutes so he could check his blog once before crawling into bed wasn't going to kill him. He saw that he had a few more comments plus a direct message from ShyGirl97.

He smiled as he sat down at his computer, sleep completely forgotten.

5. Episode Five

Summary for the Chapter:

"Please tell me we're doing something besides this all day, though," [Stan said.]

Rebecca laughed.

"I'm afraid I can't say I agree. The point of yoga is to tire out the kids."

"Oh, well, in that case... Time to get back to work." Stan pretended to drop the toddler, who giggled uncontrollably at Stan's antics. Well, if he wasn't the cutest thing. "It's good, though. That they're learning an activity while socializing."

"Tooting your own horn, I see."

"Oh, no. I don't come up with any of the stuff the community center does. I mean, I thought the coveralls gave that away."

"Well, I try not to judge," Rebecca said softly.

As a twitcher, of course Stan had thought about flying. He remembered, when he was younger, sitting on the low roof of his family's house and watching all the birds fly past. He often wished that he could fly away with them and go on amazing adventures. It was that fantasy that had gotten him interested in learning as much about birds as he could. He figured that if he were to fly away with them, it was only fair that he knew which species were which. One summer, he went to the library and checked out every book he could find on birds. It took awhile to put what he was learning into practice because he didn't have binoculars at first, but he was so dedicated, and his mother took notice.

That following year, after saving up, she bought him a pair. He had cried he was so happy, and despite it being slightly cold outside, he

had immediately ran upstairs, climbed out the window, and peered through his new binoculars. Sadly, at that moment, there hadn't been many birds flying around, but he had still able to get used to the binoculars and he became incredibly excited about everything he was going to be able to do in the future.

Twitching became his *thing* after that. Everyone at temple and at school knew how much he loved birds. He would be stopped on the street and told about a cool bird someone had seen, and often times he was able to tell them from their description what bird it was that they had encountered. It was an amazing feeling.

So, yes, the first thing he did when he got home that day after they had all realized they had super powers was to fly with the birds.

He no longer had the space that he did back home, unfortunately. When his father had asked him to find a new place to live, which somehow felt worse than if he had been actually kicked out, Stan knew he could count on his friend Patty.

They had met their senior year of high school when her family had moved to Derry, and they had just clicked. Patty had a two bedroom apartment to herself, after her roommate had dropped out of college. She had been looking for someone to take her place for the past few months but hadn't had luck. Obviously she hadn't been happy about the circumstances that had led to him moving in, but she was still ecstatic to have him. His family had helped him move his things in, and then that had been the last he had seen them since.

So, he no longer had his space, and it was difficult to make his way to the roof of Patty's apartment building. Well, he supposed it was also his apartment building now as well. He did have to start looking for a job so he could help with the rent, so he had trouble looking at it as his home too. He felt like a guest. Which had made him even more nervous about sneaking up onto the roof. It was dark out, so he hoped that he wouldn't be seen. He had taken a deep breath, threw his head back, and felt himself float up off the ground beneath him. He hadn't been able to control it well enough to fly with the birds, but he had passed a few. It had been the best moment of his life. He had been afraid for a moment that he was going to fall because he

had gotten so distracted watching the birds flying by.

Since then, he had flown a few more times. He was getting better at it each time, and he finally felt comfortable enough taking his phone with him so he could take some pictures. He had never been able to get ones so close. He could see each individual feather, that he had teared up when he looked through all the photos that he had taken. He had wanted to show them to Patty, but he wasn't sure how to explain how he had taken them without telling her that he had a fucking super power.

As much as he loved how his power was perfect for him now that he had used it in his day to day life, he still felt like a freak. He already had so much going against him that people saw and thought that he was a freak. He knew that Patty didn't feel that way, but he was still afraid that this might be what led her to see him the way that so many others did.

He decided to keep it from her. He figured it would be easy enough since so much of his time was being taken up by community service, as it was.

"Oh no. Not babies."

The seven losers, as Richie had unfortunately dubbed them, had walked into the community center that morning to be met with the persistent wailing of several very upset children. Stan didn't exactly hate children. It simply was a matter that they made a lot of noise, and he wasn't a fan of loud noises. Richie, on the other hand, seemed to be taking it as a personal offense.

"Not babies," he repeated. "No, I do not do well with babies."

"Well, I don't know what to tell you," Sally said. "You are going to be helping the mothers during their bonding exercises."

"I don't think I can do it either," Eddie said. "Babies poop and the germs and..."

"Yeah, me and Eds should get a pass," Richie said as he tugged Eddie

to his side.

Sally simply stared at them and then walked away.

"How about you two stop trying to always get out of work?" Mike asked.

"That's rich coming from you," Richie said, pointing a finger at his chest. "How many times have you run off to get handsy with Bill, huh?"

Stan sighed, expecting this to be enough of Richie pushing buttons to get everyone fighting. He wasn't judging them for it, since he knew that Richie got under his skin even more than the others. Well, except for maybe Eddie. He could still be exasperated by it all.

Bill surprised him, however.

"You're just jealous because you're not getting any."

Bev let out a loud whoop and held up her hand for a high five. Bill returned it without breaking eye contact with Richie. Ben laughed quietly while Eddie had no trouble practically guffawing, doubled over and wiping the tears from his eyes. Surprisingly, Mike was the one who seemed embarrassed by the whole thing, blushing slightly as he left the group to get to work. Not for the first time, Stan questioned why he had the worst luck and had ended up with this crazy group. Although, if he was being honest with himself, this crazy group was starting to grow on him.

While he normally would give anything to have an excuse to gang up on Richie, Stan followed Mike into the main so he could get to work. The mothers were sitting on yoga mats while holding their babies in their laps. Stan hadn't realized bonding exercises meant literal exercising, but he would be lying if he said he couldn't use some yoga. He set up a mat next to one of the mothers and tried to follow her movements. It was harder than it looked and after awhile she leaned over, introduced herself as Rebecca, and offered him some help with the positions.

Eventually the rest of their group joined them. Ben and Bev were naturals at yoga, which Stan tried to not be jealous about. Richie and Eddie immediately started goofing off, of course. Stan wasn't sure if he wanted them to just fuck already and get it over with, or if that would only make them even *more* insufferable, leaving him to have to deal with their constant bickering. Because deep down he knew that even if they got together, they would still bicker. It was so annoying and definitely not cute.

Stan wasn't jealous that all his new friends had seemed to pair up. The only reason he was in this mess in the first place was because of a relationship gone bad. Stan had known that Patrick was still coming to terms with his sexuality when they had started dating, and he had been fine with it. While he had accepted his own bisexuality years ago, he wasn't out to his family, so it wasn't like he could judge anyone else. But then Patrick got nervous as their relationship became serious, and he decided to break things off. But not before telling Stan's father that he had seen him with another man. Stan went from a fun relationship to fighting for a week straight with his father, vandalizing the temple, getting kicked out, and moving in with Patty.

And, well, community service.

The point was, the last thing Stan was looking for was a relationship. He was happy taking some time for himself. So the fact that these hormone crazed people, that Stan supposed were now his friends, didn't seem all too interested in him was technically a win.

He wouldn't lie that they were literally all attractive, though. Like, what the hell was up with that?

No, what he was jealous of was that Ben and Bev weren't falling on their faces. Rebecca next to him was still trying to help, but now her son was pawing at his ankles and tripping him up even more. Mike laughed softly when Stan flopped over for the twentieth time. He finally gave up and laid there on his yoga mat as he caught his breath.

"Don't feel bad," Rebecca said. She stood over Stan, offering her hand

to help him up. Reluctantly, he took it. "I know it's a tired cliché, but it's not as easy as it looks."

"No one else seems to be having as bad of a time as I am, though," Stan mumbled.

"But you keep trying. That's the important part. I really respect that." It was sweet of her to say, but Stan had a reputation to uphold, so he scoffed. "Well, if you want to look at it this way, there's no instructor. We're all just doing what we can, so there's really no reason to try and keep up with anyone else."

"I guess you're right." Rebecca's son had crawled into Stan's lap and he rocked him slowly. "Please tell me we're doing something besides this all day, though."

Rebecca laughed.

"I'm afraid I can't say I agree. The point of yoga is to tire out the kids."

"Oh, well, in that case... Time to get back to work." Stan pretended to drop the toddler, who giggled uncontrollably at Stan's antics. Well, if he wasn't the cutest thing. "It's good, though. That they're learning an activity while socializing."

"Tooting your own horn, I see."

"Oh, no. I don't come up with any of the stuff the community center does. I mean, I thought the coveralls gave that away."

"Well, I try not to judge," Rebecca said softly. She opened up her arms, and her son toddled over. "I'm going to take Matt for a quick bathroom break, but I'll see later."

"Okay," Stan said, waving as Rebecca carried Matt to the rest room.

"You're really great with kids," Mike said from his downward dog position.

Man, he was great at yoga too. Was it genetic?

"I used to help the kids studying for their bar mitzvah," Stan explained. "I guess that helped."

"Hey, I know it's tough for all of us to talk about why we're here, but if you ever needed to get anything off your chest, I can lend an ear."

"I, uh, I do appreciate that, but I think I need to talk to someone..."

"Who understands where you're coming from?" Mike suggested. "Trust me. I get it. Bill doesn't know what it's like to be attacked for the color of his skin, but talking to him about the fight *has* helped. Of course, it's good for me to talk to other black folks about it, and that's why I joined a support group."

"Where do you find the time?" Stan asked, surprised.

"But opening up to those you're close to helps in its own way. Just some food for thought."

"Thanks Mike. I think what'll help right now is getting out of here before I really make a fool of myself." Stan looked over his shoulder and saw that even Richie was holding a pose for more than two seconds. "Though that might be too late. I'll see you in a bit."

Stan left the main room, heading toward the vending machine that was outside the locker room. He bought a pack of M&Ms and wandered around the community center as he ate. He considered what Mike had said, but he couldn't seem to come to a decision. He kept getting distracted thinking about Matt. He was such a sweet kid, and he was overwhelmed with a need to protect him. In fact, what had he been thinking, letting Rebecca take him away by herself earlier? He should have gone with them to the rest room. Actually, now that he was thinking about it, he should have taken Matt himself. Rebecca was nice enough, but what Matt really needed was a father.

Stan's hand froze halfway to his mouth, and he dropped the red M&M he had been holding when he saw Matt standing in the hallway

ahead of him.

God, he had been right. He never should have left him.

Stan rushed forward and scooped Matt up.

"Hey, little guy," he cooed. "Are you alright?"

Matt grabbed Stan's chocolate stained fingers in his hand and smiled. Stan's heart had never felt so whole.

"Oh, you are absolutely perfect. Do you want to come home with me, sweetheart?"

Someone gasped from behind them. Stan turned around to see a very concerned Ben standing there.

"Hey, Stan," he said cautiously. "What's up?"

Stan held Matt close to his chest and started running. He ran and ran and didn't stop until he was blocks away from the community center. Hopefully the losers wouldn't think to look for him here. Because there was no doubt that Ben had immediately gone back to them and told them that he had saw Stan with Matt. They wouldn't understand why he had to do it. They'd convince themselves that they'd have to take Matt back to Rebecca because that would be the 'right' thing to do, and he couldn't let that happen. Not only did Matt need him, but he needed Matt.

He couldn't believe he had lived this long without Matt in his life.

After seeing Stan run out of the community center with one of the babies, Ben made his way back to the main room. The mothers were packing up the yoga mats, so it was easy enough to gather all the losers and drag them to the locker room.

"So, um, I think I've just seen Stan stealing a baby," he said.

Richie started laughing, bent over and slapping his knee, which was oddly appropriate. It felt as if they were in some wacky sitcom.

Ben would take that over having to dig up decomposing bodies, but they did still have to take care of this.

"Which direction did he go?" Mike asked as he rubbed his temples.

Stan found a bench where he could sit down with Matt. He was making a mental list of what he was going to have to buy before they went home when he heard footsteps approaching. He whipped around and cursed when he saw that it was the losers.

"Look, I know what you're all going to say, but I'm not bringing Matt back. He's coming home with me."

"Stan, my man, I hope you realize how fucking ridiculous that sounds," Richie said.

"How dare you curse in front of him! He's just a baby! He needs a father!"

"Stan, do you really think you can be a father for him?" Bev asked delicately.

"I don't have to deal with this."

Stan started to fly away, but between the losers yelling at him that he couldn't in broad daylight and Matt starting to cry, he floated back down.

"Stan, see, you can't do that while holding a child," Bev said.

She was still being gentle, but Richie had no trouble being blunt, of course.

"Yeah, like, you'd be the *worst* father. You vandalized your family's synagogue."

"Which led to community service," Eddie added.

Stan was about to try and defend himself, but it was as if he had a moment of clarity. What was he thinking? He couldn't be a father, could he? He turned to the losers, who looked as if they were ready to rejoice in a job well done, but then stopped. No, of course he could be a father. He would be a *great* father. It was what Matt deserved. He looked down at the toddler and smiled. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to put him at ease. He was fussing, so Stan tried to shush the losers.

"You yelled at Richie for cursing," Bill said over him, "but honestly, I think you have a dirtier vocabulary than him."

Richie snapped his fingers in front of Ben's face.

"What? Oh, my turn? Oh, well, you hit your friends a lot, which is pretty mean."

"You have trouble trusting those close to you," Mike said.

It was as if a rubber band snapped. Stan looked down at Matt, and it wasn't like he suddenly hated children, but he didn't feel the overpowering need to protect him.

"What... what just happened?" he asked.

"This may sound crazy, but I think the baby used a power to convince you to be his father," Ben said.

"Are you telling me," Richie said, pointing accusingly at Matt, "that a fucking baby has a power, and I don't? How in fuck's sake is that fair?"

"I would still trust the baby over you," Eddie said.

"How about we get back to the community center before the probation worker realizes we're missing again?" Mike said.

They started heading back, Richie and Eddie trailing behind the rest of them as they continued to bicker. Stan fell into place walking beside Mike after he handed off Matt to Bill. The toddler hadn't been

all too happy with Stan holding him, so he figured that was for the best.

"Hey, uh, do you really think I'm that bad of a person?" he asked quietly, so only Mike could hear him. "Like, that I really would fail as a father?"

"Absolutely not. Once Richie and Eddie had said that bit about the community service, we could tell it was breaking the spell," Mike said as he put his arm around Stan's shoulder.

"But everything you said was true, and if a toddler can see that makes me unfit, what does that say about me as a person?"

Mike took a deep breath.

"I can see that you and your father had some issues of your own, but I think if anything, that'll help you know what to not do once you have children of your own. I can't say exactly how since I don't know, which is why I said you have trouble trusting people, but that doesn't make you a bad person. I have faith that you can work on it and grow."

"Yeah? Yeah. I can do that. I... I think I'll look into support groups."

"That's my man."

They hadn't been fast enough getting Stan and the baby back to the community center. The mothers were running around, helping Rebecca search for Matt, and they yelled at the losers rather than thanked them once they saw they had Matt. Richie tried to convince them that the baby had wandered off and they had found him, but it appeared none of them believed that. Rebecca rushed over, taking her son, as she cried. The look of hate she gave Stan broke his heart, but he didn't try to defend himself. He didn't even say anything as he simply made his way to the locker room.

"Well, that was fucking rude," Richie said, voice echoing throughout the room. "We save the kid and what do we get? Death glares?"

"Did we technically save the baby if one of us kidnapped him in the first place?" Eddie asked. "No offense Stan."

"None taken. I was brain washed, after all."

"I'm still concerned that a baby got a power and I didn't," Richie said.

"If I have to hear about your lack of power one more time," Bill muttered.

"Richie, I promise it's not all it's cracked up to be," Bev said. "Sure, they can be helpful sometimes, but they're actually really hard to control. I almost set the curtains on fire the other night."

"I disappeared right before my parents called me for dinner and they thought I had gone out and didn't save me anything," Ben said. "When I 'came home' not having eaten, they got so angry that I hadn't told them to save anything."

Eddie leaned against the locker next to Richie's as he crossed his arms.

"Do I *have* to tell you why mine sucks?"

"Oh, but you have the best power out of everyone, Eds. You know you love it in my head."

"If you keep singing Bohemian Rhapsody in your mind, I won't be held accountable for killing you. I hope you know that."

They all laughed at that as Richie pouted.

"What about you Stan? You gonna try to convince me flying sucks?"

"Absolutely not. It's fucking awesome. I managed to get a beautiful picture of a black tail flycatcher the other day because I could fly up and get closer."

"Holy shit. I thought Eddie was exaggerating the bird watching thing."

"Asshole!" Eddie said, punching Richie's shoulder. "You weren't supposed to mention that."

Stan raised an eyebrow.

"You read my mind about bird watching?"

"For the last time, it's not like I'm purposefully invading your minds. I can't help it. When we were hanging out the one time, you just were thinking about birds really loudly, okay?"

"Well, I *do* love birds."

"That's awesome," Mike said. "Can you show us some of the pictures you've taken? We can all go to the bar and have a drink."

"Yeah," Stan said as he closed his locker. "I'd love that."

"Everyone else in?" Bill asked.

"Yeah, I don't have any plans," Richie mumbled around the cigarette he had dangling from his lips.

Eddie reluctantly agreed while Bev said yes despite looking upset after Ben told them that he was busy. She pulled him off to the side, probably to try and convince him to join the rest of them, and Stan decided it was best to give them their space. He grabbed Richie's hand in his left and Eddie's in his right and steered them out of the locker room. Mike and Bill soon followed, and they waited for Bev to join them outside. It took almost ten minutes before she and Ben came out, and she leaned against the railing with a sigh. She pulled out her cigarettes, quickly lighting one and lighting Richie's when he waved it in her face. Eddie coughed as he distanced himself.

"Ben's not coming then?" Mike asked.

"No," Bev said and then paused for a moment. "I know that not wanting to go out after a long day doesn't necessarily mean anything, but I think something might be going on with Ben."

"Well, sorry to be the voice of reason for once Red, but we can't force him to come with us," Richie said.

"Hey, I'm sure he'll talk to you when he's ready," Stan offered as he flicked Richie's nose.

"Thanks Stan. Though Richie does have a point. I shouldn't have tried

and pressure him to come with us either. I hope he realizes it was coming from a good place. Like, I just want him to feel included."

"Don't worry, Bev," Bill said, giving her a quick hug. "I'm sure he knows that he's part of this group. He just seems like a quiet guy. The bar probably isn't the best place to hang out with him. After Stan shows us his pictures, we can brain storm a good activity we could all do sometime."

Richie pretended to gag before falling into Eddie, almost knocking him over.

"You guys are all so sweet. I'm going to die over here."

"Oh, you love it," Mike said, righting Eddie. Although it was more of a subtle way to stop him from decking Richie. "You can't deny it. Now come on. Let's go get some drinks and look at birds."

Stan had never heard a better idea.

6. Episode Six

Summary for the Chapter:

"So, Ben. That probation worker, huh? She's pretty hot, right?"

Mike looked disgusted and went to pry Richie off of Ben, but Bev stopped him.

"There's a reason for the madness today," she whispered, and he nodded in understanding.

"Oh, well, I guess objectively, yes," Ben answered.

"Oh ew," Eddie said.

Bev couldn't be sure if it was the topic of whether or not their probation worker was hot or the slimy banana peel that he had picked up that had grossed him out.

"Yeah, I'd say she's pretty hot," Richie continued. "And she seems super into you, dude. You gonna take her out sometime?"

Bev had always had a reputation as a party girl. She remembered being far too young to even realize what that had meant the first time an older boy at school asked her to a party he was throwing a weekend his parents were going to be out of town. To her, parties meant the slumber parties that the other girls never invited her to. Warm pajamas, drinking hot chocolate, gossiping about boys they thought were cute, before watching a chick flick and passing out. Maybe that wasn't what slumber parties were like after all, since she had never been to one, but she still liked to think that there were people out there who could fun without getting drunk and high.

Not that she had anything against having a drink or a hit here and there. She just knew she shouldn't have been doing that at fourteen when she arrived at that boy's house and was immediately handed a beer. She threw up after an hour and ran home before anyone could

make fun of her. She vowed to never go to a party again, and yet somehow, everyone thought she out every night. She got a reputation as the girl to go to if you were looking for a good time or a quick hook up, and despite turning everyone down, it never went away.

She did suppose the smoking she picked up a year later didn't help. It seemed to only compliment her bad girl image. She knew that she shouldn't have started, and now that she had that she should quit, but she had just needed some vice. Dealing with her father was difficult, and that was putting it lightly. She knew it was wrong, and she knew she should say something, but she never could bring herself to. So she started smoking and distanced herself even more from everyone around her. It was easy enough. Everyone her age either were wrongly intimidated by her or wanted nothing to do with her. The adults didn't seem to realize something was going on at home, and she resented them for it.

It was a lonely five years, and she was surprised that she managed to last that long before she finally snapped. She wondered if her father hadn't compared her to her mother, if she ever would have. Deep down she had to have known that played a part in his abuse, but hearing him say it did something to her. She had picked up the ashtray on the kitchen table and smashed it over his head. She then had ran into the bathroom and locked herself inside. She had prepared herself for the moment her father broke the door down and retaliated, but it never came. No, instead he had called the cops and had told them that she had attacked him out of nowhere. She was so taken aback that she didn't even try to defend herself. She had felt as if her ears were full of cotton, she barely registered what they were saying. There was talk of a court date, restraining order, being forced to find a new place to live. She hadn't known who to call before she remembered that her mother had a sister who had stopped talking to her after the wedding. Bev felt so hopeless as she looked up her number. She was sure that she would want nothing to do with her, but then she started crying on the other end. She hadn't even know her sister had had a daughter, and next thing Bev knew, she was moving into her aunt's house.

She hadn't been exaggerating when she told the rest of the losers that the restraining order was a blessing in disguise. She may have been

stuck with community service, but she was finally getting to live her life. She found that she even did enjoy going out with them to have a drink once in awhile, although she usually discreetly told the bartender to not be so heavy handed while they were pouring. Now she just had to quit smoking, but it was particularly difficult with Richie as an enabler. They couldn't go an hour without him asking her if she wanted to take a smoke break. They were always offering each other a cigarette depending on who pulled their packet out first.

Baby steps, she figured.

She hadn't thought that she would manage to find herself a loving family, a hobby that she not only enjoyed but was decent at, and now new friends. She was already miles ahead in her rehabilitation than she thought she would be at that point.

She smiled as she watched said new friends arguing over which of the birds Stan had taken pictures of would make the coolest pet. Most of them were on their third or fourth drink of the evening, while she was still nursing her second, so the debate was getting heated. Stan looked as if he was close to tears as he kept interjecting that every one of the birds was beautiful and special in its own way, so why were they pitting them against each other?

Once Bev finished her drink, she told Stan that all of the birds were wonderful and she was glad that he had shared his pictures with them. She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and bid everyone a good night.

"We can discuss fun activities tomorrow while we work," she said, "because I am exhausted and I'm ready to head home."

"That's actually a good idea, Red," Richie said. He threw his arm around Eddie's shoulder and pulled him close. "I should probably walk little Eds home before it's too late."

"I'm not little!" Eddie shouted as he tried to push Richie off of him.

"Yeah, I think that's everyone's cue to head home," Mike said with a laugh.

He took care of his and Bill's tab and headed out with Bev. She wished them good night once more before turning on some music and walking home. While she hadn't lied that she was tired, she did have some energy left. She wanted to work on the one shirt that Ben had picked out the other day. It was a simple grey button up that had a hole burned in the chest. Ben had then set aside a few cloth napkins with a colorful plaid pattern for Bev to use to mend the hole. With everything that had happened the day after, she hadn't had a chance to start on any of the sewing she had planned, so she was excited to get the shirt done that night so she could give it to Ben the next morning. She hoped that it would be enough for him to realize that he was an important part of the losers, even if he wasn't as much of a drinker and therefore missed out their get together's.

It didn't take long for Bev to create a patch out of one of the napkins and then sew it into place. She carefully folded the shirt, put it into her back pack, and then finally crawled into bed. She fell asleep with a smile on her face, excited for the day to come.

She was honestly surprised when Ben was late getting to the community center, though she knew she probably shouldn't have been. He was more often late than on time anymore. She watched as he wordlessly marched from the locker room to the kitchen and poured himself some coffee. She joined him, laughing softly when she noticed that he did put less cream and sugar in than he had the last time. She dumped her one spoonful into her cup and took a few sips before approaching him.

"Hey Ben, how was your night?"

"Another long one," he mumbled. He took a big drink from his own cup and rubbed his eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm just so tired anymore. I love community service, actually, and I thought that I'd be super stoked to come in every day, but I just haven't been. I feel like I'm letting everyone down."

"Oh, don't feel like that. It's always hard getting up early, even if it's for something you enjoy. I'd be tired if I was getting up to sew." Bev took a few more sips of her coffee, chastising herself in her head for

the terrible segue way. "Speaking of sewing, I finished your shirt last night. It's in my locker, so I can give it to you before we leave."

Ben perked up at that and smiled, so Bev felt accomplished.

"Oh really? That's awesome! I thought you had all gone out. When did you have time to get it done?"

"Well, we did go out, but it wasn't for long. Stan showed us his birds and then we called it a night. So I might not be as sleep deprived as you, but I definitely do need this coffee right about now."

"Maybe we could make morning coffee our thing?" Ben asked tentatively as he ran a finger around the rim of the Styrofoam cup, causing it to squeak weirdly.

He stopped and quickly drank the rest of his coffee.

"That sounds like a great idea. I need someone to keep me company, since the rest of the guys are apparently robots who are above needing caffeine."

Bev laughed at her own joke, Ben joining in.

"Well, while I agree about the other four, I think Richie just chugs energy drinks instead. Which I think might actually be worse."

Bev pretended to gag at that.

"I am a little shocked that boy doesn't have scurvy or something. I'm going to have to start bringing in some healthy food for him."

Richie kept bugging them, asking why they kept laughing when they looked over at him, but Bev would zip her lips shut. Sally came out to tell them that it was going to be another day picking up trash and handed out the work gloves and spiked poles that they knew all too well at this point. She took her time when it was Ben's turn, talking to him softly enough that Bev couldn't pick up what she was saying. She knew that she shouldn't be eavesdropping, but she found the attention Sally was giving Ben a little concerning. Her hand had

lingered when she handed off his supplies for the day and at one point she leaned in and whispered in his ear. Bev was worried that perhaps she was simply jealous, but she looked over and saw Mike giving Bill a worried glance as well, so she knew it wasn't only her.

After telling Richie what had been so funny that morning, she was able to convince him to approach Ben about it. She wasn't entirely sure why, but she felt his intense approach was the way to go. Richie fell in line with Ben as they were walking around the neighborhood and immediately started talking his ear off.

"So, Ben. That probation worker, huh? She's pretty hot, right?"

Mike looked disgusted and went to pry Richie off of Ben, but Bev stopped him.

"There's a reason for the madness today," she whispered, and he nodded in understanding.

"Oh, well, I guess objectively, yes," Ben answered.

"Oh ew," Eddie said.

Bev couldn't be sure if it was the topic of whether or not their probation worker was hot or the slimy banana peel that he had picked up that had grossed him out.

"Yeah, I'd say she's pretty hot," Richie continued. "And she seems super into you, dude. You gonna take her out sometime?"

"Oh, I possibly couldn't do that," Ben said, and Bev let out a sigh of relief. She should have trusted that Ben would realize how inappropriate the situation was. "I mean, I'm me."

Oh no. That wasn't the reason that he shouldn't ask her out. Of course, Bev's first instinct was to interrupt and tell Ben that he was absolutely a catch, but that would definitely send the wrong message. She couldn't interrupt just yet, however, because there was still the small matter of finding out what it was that Sally had said to him. If she interrupted Richie now, she had a feeling that Ben would be too

scared to finish the conversation.

"Hey, man, you're a total catch," Richie said, as if he could read Bev's mind as clearly as Eddie could. "And she obviously seems into you. What did she say earlier? That you're a total hunk?"

"What? No, nothing like that," Ben said, blushing. "She, uh, just asked about other volunteer work I've done. Must have been in my file or something. She wants me to think of ideas for the community center."

"That's actually pretty awesome." Richie sounded surprised, and Ben gave him a confused look.

He naturally retreated into his shell after that since it seemed he had caught on to the fact that Richie hadn't been interested in the first place. Richie found his way to Eddie's side, as if they were magnets, and their bickering soon provided the perfect background noise for the losers as they worked. Bev kept checking in on Ben every once in awhile to make sure that he was alright. He was quiet the rest of the day, and eventually he put in his earphones and fully ignored the rest of them. He didn't even hum along, which Bev had noticed he would do when he wasn't in the mood to full on sing.

Bev knew the best course of action would be to leave Ben alone. He had made it clear that he didn't want to talk to anyone for the rest of the afternoon. Distancing herself from others was what she was good at, but she found that with the losers, she couldn't do that. It felt wrong. She didn't interrupt Ben's music, but she made sure to stay close to him as they continued picking up trash. She didn't join in the conversation the rest of them were having. She picked up some bits and pieces here and there. Stan described some more birds that he didn't show them pictures of. Mike explained how he took care of the animals on his family's farm and how community service was cutting into that time he normally would spend with them. It was relaxing to listen to her friends that even if she hadn't been keeping an eye on Ben, she wouldn't have *felt* a need to say anything.

The sun was starting to set when they made their way back to the community center. They emptied their bags into the Dumpsters that lined the back of the building and then returned their equipment to

the office. Sally was waiting there, which was a surprise. Up until that morning, she hadn't been very hands on. She wasn't giving any speeches like their first probation worker had. She hadn't seemed entirely interested in their rehabilitation. In a way, Bev almost missed the tough love approach that Tony had been going for before, you know, they had to kill him. But now she was jumping up from the desk, almost tipping over the mug of tea she had been sipping from, and taking the spiked pole from Ben. Her hand lingered once more as she talked to Ben while leaning on the pole as if it were a cane. Richie gave Bev a look that she could only describe as the slash mouth emoji. He then mimed gagging before Eddie leaned in and harshly whispered a warning to him.

Bev was thankful she wasn't the only one who was worried about the way Sally was acting around Ben. She had already asked for Richie's help, though, so she knew that she had to handle it herself now, and hopefully she could get through to him. As they were starting to change, she made her way to Ben's locker, his shirt that she had sewn for him in hand.

"Hey, you wanna see if this fits before you put your shirt on?" she asked. "I know you tried it the other day, but now that I've done some sewing, it may have cinched it a bit. I wanna see if I need to make any adjustments before we can officially say it's yours."

"Oh, yeah. That's a good idea."

Ben pulled the shirt on and quickly buttoned it up. It looked perfect.

"Ooh, look at Ben. Lookin' sharp," Richie said and then wolf whistled. "Give us a spin, baby."

"There's nothing special on the back," Ben said as he blushed.

"I can put something on the back if you want," Bev suggested. "You want a patch?"

"I think that'd be a little too hardcore for me."

"Not at all. You're a total bad ass," Stan said, although he hadn't even

looked to see the shirt.

He was hopping around, trying to get his jeans on, and Bev was worried that he probably hadn't gotten much sleep the night before either.

"The only requirement to wearing something is wanting to wear it," Bev said. "At least, that's the rule I've been living by recently. If you rock it, then that's all that matters. So, did you want to maybe come over? We can look through what I have and make some tweaks?" Bev looked around to make sure that the others weren't close enough to hear when she added, "And we could talk about what's going on with you?"

Ben jumped back, hitting the locker. The whole row shook and a water bottle in Bill's locker went flying to the floor and rolling across the room. The other five losers looked over at Ben, concerned. Bev wanted to scream in frustration. It wasn't just Ben who was hesitant to fully trust them. Bev could see how, despite how close they were becoming, they all were reluctant to fully open up. She honestly couldn't judge them for it since she was exactly the same. She had alluded enough that they could guess what had happened, but it wasn't as if she told them in as many words. But right now, the issue was making sure Ben was comfortable enough to talk to her about what had been interrupting his sleep and the probation worker so that Bev could help him.

Ben surprised her, then, though.

"Uh, yeah. I'd actually like that."

"Awesome. Then you can wear the shirt out if you want, and you can hand it over to me when we're ready to work on it."

A few minutes later, the losers were leaving the community center. Mike and Bill were heading in their own direction so they could get dinner together. Richie insisted in walking Eddie home as far as he could, and Stan joked that he didn't need them anyway as he walked in a completely different direction from everyone else.

As they walked, Ben offered one of his headphones to Bev so they could listen to music together. It was another pop band, although Bev didn't recognize it. She had actually been hoping for some New Kids on the Block or other old school pop because she had always had a soft spot for it, but she soon found out that Ben's taste in music was superior all around. Once they had made it to Bev's place, she introduced him to her aunt as he was trying to pause his music and put away his headphones. He still hadn't even put them away before Bev was rushing him up to her room. She pulled out all the clothes, fabrics, and patches she had in her collection and told Ben to look through and find what he would like to add to his shirt. As he was sifting through everything, Bev opened the window and lit up a cigarette.

As she blew the smoke outside, she tentatively asked, "Ben, was Sally making you uncomfortable today?"

"A little bit, actually," Ben said quietly. "But it's also nice to have someone show interest in me. Obviously that doesn't happen to me often. And now for it to happen with two different women is crazy."

Bev's hand paused halfway out the window, where she had been knocking the ash off of her cigarette, and had to think for a moment. Had the way she'd been acting come off as flirting? She honestly couldn't say. Considering she hadn't much experience making friends, she had definitely had no experience with talking to someone she was interested in romantically. *Did* she like Ben? They hadn't known each other that long, and she could maybe see herself forming a relationship with him, but it was something that would have to be built up. At the moment, she was happy to have him as a friend. She was about to tell him this when Ben continued.

"There's this person who I've been talking to online. She likes my blog and we've been talking about the history of Derry and it's been awesome, but she's online, you know? But then Sally asks me if I'm interested in history and so that means I have someone in real life I could talk to about it. I mean, we won't be able to do it much since I have to, you know, clean up trash and paint walls and stuff with you guys, but that's awesome, right?"

That was way too much of a coincidence for Bev.

She threw her cigarette out the window and sat down on the floor next to Ben.

"Did she happen to ask you about any specific things? That the girl online had previously?"

Ben paused, the patch he had been looking at falling from his hand back onto the pile.

"Actually, now that you mention it, uh, yeah. She asked about the sewer system and me and ShyGirl97 had talked about that two nights ago."

"Ben, I'm sorry, but I... I think Sally might be the person who left the note in Stan's locker. I think she's trying to get close to you to see what you know."

"That is a pretty big leap," Ben said angrily. He picked the patch back up and clenched it in his hands. "Is it really harder to believe that she's interested in me?"

"No! Of course not! But even if that isn't the case, it's really inappropriate for her to pursue you. She's our probation worker!"

"Well, thanks for inviting me over Bev, but I'm afraid that I have to get home. I have things I have to do."

"Ben, please, if you're going to go... Promise me you'll get some sleep tonight."

Ben froze in the doorway, looked back to Bev, and shook his head.

"I don't know why you'd ask me to make a promise," he said, almost sadly. "I haven't really kept any of the others for you."

And with that he was gone.

Bev had spent so long trying to not step on anyone's toes, and that

had been her method of dealing with people since she had moved into her aunt's house, but she knew that it was time that she had to leave her comfort zone.

The next day was another relatively uneventful one of community service. At one point Bill did have to discreetly move Mike to the locker room to rest for a moment when his X-ray vision caused him to have a panic attack. Eddie also left the group so he could help him through it since he dealt with them often. Bev gave Richie a hug when she saw how devastated he looked when Eddie had admitted that. Once those three came back, the day went by quickly, and Mike was even joking with them by the time they were getting ready to leave.

Bev told them that she wanted to discuss 'lady issues' with Sally when they asked why she was hanging behind, and sadly it was enough to get them all to leave her alone without further questioning. She found Sally in the rest room washing her hands, and so she waited in the doorway for Sally to notice her. The probation worker turned around and gasped when she saw Bev standing there like a specter.

"Oh, Bev, you scared me."

"Sorry about that. I just needed to talk to you about something... ShyGirl."

Now Sally *really* did look as if she had seen a ghost. The blood drained from her face and she started to back up into the sinks.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"If you're going to be playing this kind of game, you should work on being more convincing. I didn't believe that at all. So now I need you to not lie to me and tell me what you're doing to Ben. Are you actually interested in him? Are you toying with his emotions for fun? Or is it something else?"

Sally gasped.

"You did. I knew you did. You guys killed Tony."

"We didn't kill anyone," Bev said calmly, walking closer to Sally.
"They must have ran away."

"You made it look like that, but I know Tony. He wouldn't do... he wouldn't have done that to me."

And that's when Bev realized why Sally had been so invested in the police's search for her coworkers. Because Tony was more than just a coworker. She did feel sorry for her, but this was terrible news for the losers. She clearly wasn't going to let it go.

Unfortunately, Bev had let her guard down enough that Sally grabbed her head and smashed it into the mirror. Her vision blurred and she felt something warm and viscous dripping down her face as she stumbled back and fell onto her ass. When she lifted her hand and gently touched her face, her hand came back covered in blood. Oh yeah, blood would be warm and viscous. Wait. She still had to stop Sally. She couldn't let this slow her down. She pushed herself back up and wandered out of the bathroom. She could see Sally just making it into the office and going for the phone. It took everything she had to run there and grab it out of her hands. Sally tried to reach for it, but Bev was able to hold it out of her grasp.

"You're... you're not calling anyone," she managed to get out.

"You all need to pay for what you did."

"We were just protecting ourselves. He was trying to kill Eddie."

"Tony wouldn't do that," Sally said, but she had stopped trying to get the phone back. "He... he wouldn't."

Bev awkwardly patted Sally's shoulder, hoping that it would be comforting. Sally, however, grabbed her wrist and twisted her arm behind her back. She was able to run past Bev that way, and Bev threw the phone onto the ground as she went after her. Sally was so close to making it out the door, and Bev couldn't let that happen. She grabbed the back of Sally's shirt and pushed her up against the door, hoping to knock her unconscious. She hadn't realized how close to

the hinges they were, and as soon as Sally's head smashed against it, it cracked her skull. Bev watched in horror as Sally slid lifelessly to the floor, blood flowing from the wound even faster than her own.

She panicked. There was no way of putting it nicely. She had just killed someone. She had just killed *another* person after helping to kill before. She did the only thing she could think of, and pulled Sally into the store room and stuffed the body into the freezer. Then she went back to clean up all the blood from the door and surrounding floor before patching herself up as best as she could and hightailing it out of the community center.

Of course her aunt had jumped to the conclusion that she had ran into her father and he had hit her, which saved Bev from coming up with a cover story. She only had to convince her to not call the police or their lawyer. She said she just didn't want to deal with it, and seeing how tired she was, her aunt led her to the couch while she went back to the kitchen and made her some tea.

Bev felt like she should feel bad. Feel guilty. But strangely enough, she only felt anxious about how she was going to explain the disappearance of ShyGirl97 to Ben.

Huh. Maybe she liked him after all.

7. Episode Seven

Summary for the Chapter:

"I was a nasty slut," she said. Eddie could feel the bench moving as either Richie or Bill was laughing. "I went with so many boys... and girls."

"Oh, she's bi!" Stan said excitedly. "That's not bad."

"Girls and boys at the same time," the girl continued. "I took part in disgusting... perverted... unnatural acts. I was drinking... and taking drugs. I used bad language all the time. I called my mom..." The group surrounding her held their breath as the girl gathered the courage to repeat what it was that she had said. "A fat bitch." And then they gasped loudly. "But... I'm not like that anymore. I'm a good person."

The rest of the group started applauding. The girl sort of curtsied awkwardly before sitting down. Another one of them stood up, and told the group 'We have to show them the way. They don't have to live like this.' Well. That must be the leader of the group. Eddie nervously turned around to see what the others thought. They were all staring, shocked, until Richie started pointing at the group with the burning joint.

"That... That isn't normal."

Notes for the Chapter:

ok this is my favorite episode and there's so much going on so it's being broken up into two separate chapters

also the POV is all over the place but the next one is definitely going to be mike's chapter so that they all get one for themselves i promise!

Eddie may have felt awful because he had known Richie was homeless since the day his parents had kicked him out and, up until that point, had done absolutely nothing about it. In his defense, he was completely taken aback when the third day of community service, Richie's mind was going a million miles per hour and he was thinking, *'Oh God, he's never going to like me if he finds out I'm homeless. That's just sad and pathetic. I gotta get my shit together and convince Mom to let me move back in.'* over and over again. At that point, Eddie still had been trying to convince himself that Richie wasn't actually interested in him, and so he assumed that it was Richie's way of motivating himself to improve his situation. Then, as the days passed by, and Eddie had to listen to the constant stream of Richie's thoughts, he couldn't deny it any longer.

Well, he couldn't deny that Richie obviously *did* feel something for him, but he was more concerned with the fact that he couldn't deny that Richie could use a helping hand.

He was mostly living off of snacks from the vending machine, first of all.

That day, one of the other employees at the community center informed them that Sally was out sick and being short handed, they were canceling community service that day. The losers didn't have to be told twice, and they were rushing to the locker room to change back into their street clothes. Richie was faster than the rest of them, and was practically skipping out as Eddie quickly tried to pull enough clothes to be decent enough to run after him. He managed to corner Richie by the vending machine, of all places, before he could slink away.

"You know, you can't survive on that crap," he said.

"I'm only getting a snack," Richie said. Ignoring Eddie's deep sigh, he punched in the number for a bag of chips and added it to the pack of cookies he had already purchased. "Okay, so a couple of snacks."

"Richie, seriously, don't you dare," Eddie said as Richie then punched in the number for a can of Coke as well. Richie maintained eye contact with him as he bent down, reached into the slot, and picked up the drink. Eddie was reminded of a cat, knocking a glass of water

off a table, if he was being perfectly honest. "Look, why don't you come to my place. My mom will still be at work, and I can cook lunch for us."

"Oh, yeah?" Richie smiled, and God. He looked like such a dope. "What ya cookin'?"

"Chicken nuggets."

"Wow. I didn't know I was talking to a trained chef."

'God, that's so adorable. He's so adorable. I bet he buys those dinosaur chicken nuggets. Though, I'd eat anything he made.'

"I'm going to take that as a yes," Eddie said, grabbing Richie's hand.

"You read my mind again, didn't you?" Richie asked, defeated.

He let Eddie lead him back into the locker room so he could stash his vending machine delicacies in his locker, and then they were on their way to Eddie's house. Eddie forced him out of the kitchen, telling him his thoughts were too distracting, and so Richie waited in the living room while Eddie made their food. He brought out two plates once it was done and they ate in relative silence while watching some ridiculous day time television. Eddie did allow Richie to help him clean up afterward, the two of them splashing each other with soap suds as they washed the dishes. Without the others around, it was surprisingly easy to be around Richie, Eddie found.

"Hey Rich? Why do you have to tease and pick on people so much?"

"I don't know," Richie said honestly, as he scratched at his cheek, getting even more suds all over himself. "I just thought... people like the funny guy, you know?"

"The losers already like you. You can tone it down a bit. Like, right now? We're still doing our thing, but now I don't want to strangle you."

"What if I *want* you to strangle me?" Richie asked as he waggled his eyebrows.

Eddie pushed past him, annoyed, and tried to focus on putting away the clean dishes.

"See? This is what I'm talking about. You can be such an ass."

"Yeah, but I'm *your* ass."

"I guess you are," Eddie whispered.

'Oh shit. Oh shit. Is this, like, a moment? I think we're having a moment.'

Eddie sighed.

"God, Richie, just get over here and kiss me already."

Eddie heard something clatter behind him, and then he was being turned around, Richie staring into his eyes as if he was looking for something. Looking for a sign that Eddie was joking? Of course he wasn't fucking joking, so he grabbed Richie's face and pulled him down so he could kiss him. Since Richie wasn't going to do it first. It was messy and uncoordinated for a moment, because Eddie had no idea what he was doing. It was his first kiss, and he was so glad that Richie wasn't the one who could read minds and make fun of him for that. Although he had a feeling that Richie wouldn't have made fun of him for it.

Thankfully, though, he soon took control of the kiss, pulling Eddie close to him. Eddie could feel Richie's heart beating fast and he moaned. Richie leaned back, a little bit of saliva still connecting their lips. Eddie wanted to be grossed out by it, but he found that he didn't really care. Richie smiled down at him and then they were kissing again.

And again.

Richie tried to pick Eddie up and sit him on the counter, and that's when Eddie finally had to admit they should take it elsewhere. It took three times longer than it normally would for them to get to his room. Richie kept pushing up against the wall and kissing him within an inch of his life. Eddie didn't really mind, but he would have preferred if they could sit down. He let out a sigh of relief when they finally landed on his bed.

Richie kept kissing him even as he worked his jeans open, hand sneaking in and teasing the head of Eddie's cock through his briefs. Which obviously felt amazing, but he really did think he liked kissing best.

And he knew that Richie felt the same way too.

'God, Eds. So beautiful. Could kiss you forever. Want to kiss you forever. Kiss you in front of everyone so they know I'm yours. I'm ready. Please, please, please.'

Eddie thought that could be arranged.

The next morning, Richie seemed in a much better mood than he had been in weeks. Funny enough, since they were all sitting around lazily and ignoring their work. Sally was still out of work, and the other employees at the community center didn't have much time for the losers, and so they were given such loose orders. They had all elected to simply say 'fuck it' and Richie had produced a joint from the pockets of his coveralls. He, Bev, and Bill were the only ones who were smoking, although Eddie would be lying if he said that he wasn't interested in trying it. Another day, perhaps. He had already done so many new things in the last 24 hours.

Bringing a guy home. Making out with him. Having sex.

Were they too old to consider hand jobs sex? He wasn't sure. Did it mean he technically wasn't a virgin anymore?

He'd have to contemplate that later because the group that had been gathering outside of the community center were finally settling down. One of the girls stood up and started speaking. They were close enough, and she was speaking loudly, so Eddie was able to catch every word, and he was oddly concerned.\

"I was a nasty slut," she said. Eddie could feel the bench moving as either Richie or Bill was laughing. "I went with so many boys... and girls."

"Oh, she's bi!" Stan said excitedly. "That's not bad."

"Girls and boys at the same time," the girl continued. "I took part in disgusting... perverted... unnatural acts. I was drinking... and taking drugs. I used bad language *all* the time. I called my mom..." The group surrounding her held their breath as the girl gathered the courage to repeat what it was that she had said. "A fat bitch." And then they gasped loudly. "But... I'm not like that anymore. I'm a good person."

The rest of the group started applauding. The girl sort of curtsied awkwardly before sitting down. Another one of them stood up, and told the group 'We have to show them the way. They don't have to live like this.' Well. That must be the leader of the group. Eddie nervously turned around to see what the others thought. They were all staring, shocked, until Richie started pointing at the group with the burning joint.

"That... That isn't normal."

"Yeah, that's a lot of self hate," Bev agreed. She reached for the joint, which Richie handed over.

"You know, now that I'm thinking about it, the young people in my neighborhood have been acting strange recently too," Bill said. "Like, there's nothing wrong with either sleeping around or not, but seeing people who used to be more 'free spirit' types suddenly dressing all conservative is a bit odd."

"I guess they've been going to these meetings," Mike said. "Though this is the first I've seen anything like it."

As Bill put the joint out on the back of the bench, another one of the group members started to walk toward them. Well, toward the community center more likely. Richie reached out and grabbed his wrist.

"Hey, buddy. What's going on over there?"

"It's a Virtue meeting," the man said. "We hold meetings almost every day at the community center. You should come to one."

"Oh, yeah, sure pal. Thanks." Richie waited until the guy was far away enough that he wouldn't hear him before he repeated, "It's not normal."

"Just because you got laid yesterday," Eddie whispered, "anyone who isn't interested is weird?"

Richie, to his credit, blushed at that.

"What about you?" he asked, pointing at Ben. "Seen anything weird lately?"

"Uh, no?"

"Of course not. You're so weird you don't know it when you see it. You'd screw your own sister for a slice of cheese."

"I don't even like cheese," Ben said, getting worked up.

"That makes it worse."

"Hey, leave him alone Rich," Bev said. "He's just joking right now, Ben. He's not serious."

Ben crossed his arms, muttering, 'I know that' before he stomped back to the community center.

"Rich, you gotta stop teasing him like that."

"Yeah, man," Stan added. "I don't think he really gets that you actually like him despite that."

"Fine, fine. I'll go apologize to him."

Richie stood up, hesitated for a moment by the bench, and then quickly stooped down so he could kiss Eddie on the cheek. Then he ran away before any of them could say anything.

"When the hell did that happen?" Stan asked. Bill was staring even harder than he had been at the Virtue group, his mouth open like a fish out of water. "What the hell? I honestly thought you two would kill each other before admitting you enjoyed the fighting."

"It wasn't fighting," Eddie insisted. "It was bickering."

"It was foreplay," Mike said with a laugh. "Hey, Eddie? You gonna go get your man?"

"We're not about to have sex in the community center!" Eddie shouted.

Some of the Virtue members glanced over at them thanks to his outburst. Stan smiled and waved at them, which didn't go over that well. Some of them scowled back while the others just ignored him.

"Well, I have to admit I'm glad you two aren't planning on that," Mike said. He glanced over at Bill, smiling shyly. "Do you wanna..."

Bill nodded, reaching out and taking Mike's hand.

"God, you're all so gross," Stan said. "I'm going to go raid the kitchen. Bev? Eddie? You guys wanna come with me?"

Eddie couldn't agree faster.

While Mike and Bill had normally been using the store room for their, shall we say, rendezvouses, there was a weird smell in there recently, so they decided to try for the bathroom. They had made it to the men's room to find that the whole place was flooded. One of the other probation workers was there, trying to mop the water up, to no avail. The two of them quickly backed out before he noticed them and roped them into helping out.

"We could try the ladies room?" Bill suggested.

Bill was probably a little more than high, and Mike probably shouldn't have agreed. But he really couldn't help himself from getting his hands all over his boyfriend. They peaked into the ladies room to make sure that it was empty before falling into one of the stalls and locking the door behind them. Bill was immediately on him, kissing his lips and then his chin and then his neck. His hands were fumbling with the zipper on Mike's coveralls, so he helped him

get them down around his thighs. Mike reached behind them, closing the lid on the toilet, and then sat down. He didn't even have to ask before Bill was climbing into his lap.

"You still loose from last night, baby?" he asked. Bill hummed and nodded his head. "Okay, well, we gotta get your coveralls off too, then. Come on, baby. Up."

Bill stood up quickly, kicking out of his coveralls, and then was right back on Mike. He reached into his boxers and pulled out his cock, which was already hard and dripping. What could Mike say? Bill got quiet and needy when he was high, and it was adorable. He just wanted to fuck him and listen to Bill's cute little moans. It took some work to get Bill's underwear pushed down because it appeared he wasn't up for moving a second time, but Mike managed and got his fingers into his hole.

"Right pocket, baby. The lube's in there. Can you get it for me?"

"Yeah," Bill said, as he grabbed the tube and pressed it into Mike's other hand.

Mike lubed himself up, hoping that two fingers was enough after they had fucked the night before. He eased himself in slowly, just in case, but after that it was fast and hard. They pretty much could get away with murder at the community center, pardon the expression, but he still didn't want to push their luck. They were so into it, neither of them had heard that someone had entered the room. It wasn't until they stumbled out of the stall so they could clean up that they saw one of the Virtue members, the girl who had seemed to be mediating the impromptu story sharing, standing near the sink. She looked absolutely appalled, and Mike couldn't blame her.

"Oh my God, we're so sorry," Bill said.

"There is honestly no excuse for that," Mike added. "We'll just get out of your hair now."

Dozens of scenarios ran through Mike's head, because he knew there was no way she wasn't going to report him and Bill to one of the probation workers, and honestly he wouldn't even hold it against her.

She had every right to. He hadn't expected, though, for her to grab his arm and stop him from exiting the bathroom.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing?"

"Let him go," Bill said.

He was still standing with one hand holding the door open, but he looked seconds away from jumping her if he had to.

"Do you two really think that sleeping around is going to make you happy?"

"We're not sleeping around. We're together," Mike said."

"Yeah. I love him," Bill said, and Mike's breath caught in his throat. He knew deep down it hadn't been that long, and that Bill was still a little high, but it was so sweet of him to stand up for Mike that way. "There's nothing wrong with being intimate with the person you love."

"In a dirty bathroom stall?" the woman countered. "If you treat yourself like dirt, others will treat you like dirt."

"Look, we apologized for that," Mike said, trying to dislodge the woman's hand. She was truly starting to frighten him. "I will be the first to admit that it was wrong, and I wouldn't blame you for telling on us, but hurting my arm isn't the way to go about all of this."

The woman ignored him, took a deep breath, and then looked deep into his eyes. When she finally did speak, her voice sounded... *different*. Hypnotic.

"You don't need to behave like this. You can be so much better."

Mike wasn't sure what happened after that. The next thing he remembered was waking up in the main room once it was dark out. He and Bill had been laid down gently on the floor, but with some blankets at least. There were new, much more respectable, clothes laid out for them, and Mike let out a sigh of relief. There was no way he and Bill could change back into the clothes they had arrived in. They couldn't command respect with the way they had been been

dressing. Bill's cut off shorts were especially inappropriate.

Mike leaned over and gently nudged Bill's shoulder.

"Hey, sweetheart, wake up."

Bill yawned and then groaned. He brought his hand up to his forehead, rubbing it.

"I feel awful," he said. "Mike, don't let me ever smoke that horrible stuff again."

"I won't. We're going to turn our lives around now."

"I'm so glad to hear that," the woman from earlier said. She must have been in the office and heard them once they had started talking, even though they were speaking hushed tones. "I'm Rachel. I'm so glad you two wish to clean up your act. I see you found the outfits I left for you."

"Yes, thank you so much for that," Mike said. "I'll go to the men's room to change first."

Because that only made sense. He couldn't imagine changing in the room at the same time as Bill. How did he ever have sex with him in the public space mere hours before? How did he have sex with Bill when they hadn't even been on a proper date yet? They had only known each other for a couple weeks. They were moving far too fast to be respectable.

"Fantastic," Rachel said. As Mike stood up, she handed him a little ribbon with a safety pin attached. "Every member wears one," she explained. "Welcome to Virtue."

Okay, so the Virtue group had been funny at first, but now there was no denying it.

They were terrifying.

When Stan walked into the community center that morning, the entire main room and the office had been completely taken over by people wearing the Virtue ribbon. It was a pale pink, which is why he probably hadn't seen them the previous day when they were far away. Every member was wearing such washed out tones that the ribbons completely blended in.

All the members were blending in with each other.

In fact, Stan must have walked right past Bill and Mike at first. He and the other four losers waited in the locker room for those two to arrive, but they never did. They couldn't be late reporting to the probation worker, since they had already gotten into enough trouble recently, so they headed into the main room. And then that's when they saw Bill and Mike helping some of the Virtue members unloading flyers from boxes.

"What the fuck?" Richie said, startling several of the members and causing them to drop their flyers.

"You're going to have to pick those up," Mike said, sounding disappointed.

"Fuck the flyers," Richie said. "What happened to you two? You look like grandpas. And not the foxy kind."

"Shut up Rich," Eddie said, slapping his arm.

"You two really shouldn't hurt each other," Bill said. "That's not a healthy way to show your affection."

"Wow. I'm amazed someone finally said it," Stan said. Bev glared at him. "But he shouldn't have?"

"Are you guys alright?" Ben asked.

"Of course we're alright," Mike replied. "We only joined Virtue yesterday, but at least I'm already feeling so much better about myself."

"Oh, I totally agree Mike," Bill said. "We were disgusting perverts before. Having sex in the community center? How could anyone

respect us when we did something that aberrant."

"Why do you sound like you swallowed a self help book and a dictionary?" Richie asked. Stan noticed he was holding the arm that Eddie had hit, although there was no way he had been hit *that* hard. Eddie tried to lean into Richie's side, but Richie quickly stepped off to the side. "No, seriously. How do you pull an entire 360 in one day?"

"180," Stan said. "A 360 would be turning right back around to where you started."

"Oh, yeah. I should have known that. Thanks man."

Richie held out his fist, and despite the ridiculousness of the entire situation, Stan knew he couldn't leave him hanging. He bumped his fist, earning another glare from Bev.

"Mike? Bill? How about you guys change into your coveralls and we can talk about this more once we start working," she suggested.

"Sorry. No can do," Bill said. He leaned down and started picking up the flyers that Richie was resoundingly ignoring. "The probation workers told us since we're helping Virtue, we're exempt from community service now."

"Okay, now *that's* bullshit," Eddie said, crossing his arms.

"Well, technically, they *are* still doing community service in a way," Ben pointed out.

"Not the hill to die on right now," Stan suggested, pulling Ben aside.

"Would you be able to meet with us at the bar tonight to talk then?" Bev asked. "Once we finish up with community service, you guys should have a free moment, right?"

"No can do," Mike said as he started moving the boxes to the other side of the room. "We don't drink anymore. Neither should you. It's a nasty habit."

"Mike, you know I don't drink that often, and when I do, not that much. There's nothing wrong with having a drink here or there when

you're out with friends."

"Alcohol leads to terrible decisions," Bill said. "Which I think we've made enough of those recently."

"Okay. Can't really argue with that," Stan said.

And that was his third strike. Bev leaned in and whispered in his ear, "Can you help me? Richie and Eddie aren't exactly the best at debating, and I need someone on my side."

"Yeah. I'm sorry, Bev." Stan took a deep breath and then turned back toward Mike and Bill. "Hey, how about we meet up at my apartment instead? It'll be a nice, quiet place to have a conversation. You can even meet my friend, Patty. You guys will love her."

Mike and Bill shared a look, having a silent conversation almost, and then they thankfully agreed to meeting up later that night. It was enough for Stan, but Bev didn't seem entirely pleased. During a lull in their community service, she called a meeting in the out of order men's room. Of course, Richie took that as an opportunity to take a piss in one of the few urinals that was working while Bev was talking.

"There's a difference between deciding to make some changes in your life and suddenly adapting a whole new way of life," she said. "I think Virtue is a cult. But even then, there's no way they could have brain washed Mike and Bill that quickly."

"Unless it was the storm," Ben said.

"Oh my God, yes. Richie, are you done yet so I can turn around and actually talk to Ben?"

"Yes, the beast is back in the cage," Richie said, although he was only just tucking himself back in. Stan almost wished that Eddie hadn't turned around either, but he had seen how badly he was blushing when Richie headed toward the urinal, so he was thankful he didn't have to deal with any of their weird shit. Though, he may have spoke too soon, because Richie turned to Eddie as he put his finger to his lips. "But sshhh... It's sleeping."

"You're so fucking weird," Eddie said, although his expression was so

love struck that Stan thought he was going to loose teeth with how sweet it was.

"Uh, okay," Bev said. "Ben, you said it was the storm. You mean, like a power thing?"

"Oh come on," Richie whined. "First the fucking probation worker. Than a baby. Now the weird Puritan girl. They all get a power and I don't. I don't think so. It can't be true."

"It's *always* the storm," Ben said angrily. "When weird stuff happens, it's *always* the storm. Have you not figured that out out?"

"Wow. Did you just finally grow a set of balls?"

"I've always had a set of balls. You've just never seen them."

Stan knew that he shouldn't -- he *really* shouldn't -- but he couldn't help but laugh. Luckily, Eddie was laughing a little too. Bev either was the only one who didn't have the humor of a 12 year old boy or, more likely, was better at keeping a straight face.

"That is the gayest thing I have ever heard," Richie said. He paused for a moment before adding, speaking in such a rush that his words blended together, "And I'm really gay."

"I wish we had time to take a moment for you, Richie, but I feel like there's some more pressing matters at hand," Bev said. "I think Ben might be right. I think that Virtue actually brain washed Mike and Bill and we have to do something about it. Of course, they're going to fight it, so we're going to have to, uh, trap them at Stan's apartment."

"What? We can't do that," Stan said. "Patty doesn't know about all the storm weirdness. I can't tell her that, and she's going to ask why I'm holding two guys against their will."

"The longer they're with Virtue, though, the harder it'll be to deprogram them."

"Oh God, okay. This is going to be a disaster, but I can't let those bastards ruin Mike and Bill's lives. I'm in."

Bev looked expectantly at Ben, Richie, and Eddie.

"Of course I'll be there," Ben said.

Richie and Eddie, however, hesitated.

"Guys, come on," Bev said. "We have to stick together, right? We're in this together now."

Eddie frowned, and Stan wondered if he heard one of Bev's thoughts that would have caused that. He simply nodded before grabbing Richie's hand and making an excuse about how they had to get back to work.

"I don't think this is going to work out at all," Stan muttered, but it was too late.

They were in it now.

Well, he and Bev were in it, because they were the only two who ended up coming back to the community center that evening to meet up with Mike and Bill. Even Mike and Bill weren't there on time, and Stan was seriously thinking of leaving, when suddenly everything went dark. He heard Bev screaming next to him as she put up a fight, and all he could think was, 'Thank God one of them was going to go down kicking and screaming.'

He completely froze. He should have yelled out for help. He should have tried to pull whatever they had pulled over his head. He should have kicked out at his assailant, but he was unable to do any of that. His legs went out under him when they started to pull him away, which at least meant they had to pause and pick him up. As they were shuffling him around, he could hear Bev call out once more, although this time it sounded as if she was in pain. Then he heard a sickeningly sounding thunk, and he realized that they were probably knocking her out because she *was* fighting back. He thought he called out to her, but he couldn't be sure.

Because then he was crying out in pain when something hit the back

of his head.

"I'm not fighting," he sobbed out. "Don't... please don't..."

And then he was struck again, and he must have passed out.

When he woke up, his hand immediately went to the back of his head to feel how badly injured he was. Moving one arm brought them both up, and he realized that his hands were tied uncomfortably behind his back. He was able to reach where he had been hit, and he could feel a lump there, but it wasn't that big. That couldn't be that bad then, right?

"Stan? Is that you moving?" Bev whispered in the dark.

"Yeah. It's me. What happened?"

"I think Virtue got us. We're back in the community center. There's other people here, too, I think. I can only make out so much."

"Fuck. Okay. So they really are brain washing people. This is fucking nuts. What do we do?"

"Well, I'm tied up, so I'm going to assume we all are. So I don't know what we *can* do."

"We can't just sit here. We have to at least try to run for it, right?"

Stan could hear Bev struggling, probably sitting up, before she huffed out a sigh.

"It's going to be tough, but you're right. We have to at least try. Are you ready?"

"Yeah. As I'll ever be. Go on three?"

Bev agreed, and as Stan was saying 'two' the lights went on in the room. He squinted, trying to get his eyes to adjust quickly, but there was no time. He was grabbed before he could get his bearings, and the person was forcing him to his feet. Once he was able to see, he gasped when he realized it was Mike that was pushing him around. He tried to reason with him, but he looked completely motionless as

he led him over to the woman who had been mediating the Virtue meeting the other morning. Mike pushed Stan to his knees and soon Bev and the other people followed. The woman made her way down the line, saying something to each of them. Stan was last in the line, and when she got to him, he knew that there was nothing he could do. He had watched as each person, Bev included, had their bounds cut and they made no move to fight or escape.

He was doomed, and that left the fate of the town to Richie, Eddie, and Ben.

He didn't want to admit it, but they were fucked.

The woman placed her hand gently on Stan's shoulder and smiled at him.

"You don't need to behave like this. You can be so much better," she said, and suddenly, Stan didn't really care about saving the town anymore.

8. Episode Eight

Summary for the Chapter:

"If she can just say something to brain wash everyone, we're going to need to drown her out so she doesn't get us," Ben said. "You both have headphones you can use?"

"Oh yeah," Eddie said. "That's a fantastic idea."

"Alright, so we blast some music, and try to get the losers away from Virtue," Richie said. "Easy enough, right?"

Of course the three of them knew it was going to be more difficult than that, but they didn't mention it as they got out their headphones and queued up some music. Ben and Eddie were ready, but Richie was still scrolling through his music.

What to put on?

"What are you doing?" Eddie asked.

"You gotta have the right track for this kind of thing," Richie explained. "You need something up tempo, with a bit of edge to it. I'm thinking maybe Jay-Z. Or Dizzy."

"Oh, could you pick something already?"

"Oh yes. That's the one."

Notes for the Chapter:

whoops eta: i forgot that i said this on twitter and not in the notes here. mike is getting his own chapter! fret not. episode six (which is the one these last two chapters are based on) is all over the place, so i figured it was best to break it up between them. but the next chapter is mike's!

It had been difficult to sneak back out of the house after his mother

had fallen asleep, but Richie had scrambled his brain. He wasn't thinking straight (pun intended) and despite the possible consequences, he found himself tip toeing out the front door. Because all that mattered was spending some time alone with Richie before they were supposed to meet up with the remaining losers.

And he *knew* it was wrong that all he could think about was kissing Richie when Mike and Bill were in trouble.

But he couldn't help himself. He hadn't even heard any of his mother's thoughts that evening because he was so preoccupied day dreaming about Richie. Sure, he had gone right back to annoying him the previous day and that afternoon during their community service, but then he'd kiss his cheek or squeeze his hand, and Eddie melted. After they had been intimate, Richie told him about how he wasn't out, and Eddie assured him that it was alright. After all, he had never exactly come out himself. If he had friends, he would have told them, but the losers were the first real friends he had ever had. And he obviously was *never* going to tell his mother. At least, until he moved out and was independent. It seemed as if that would never happen, however, because she had kept him sheltered for so long that he wasn't sure that he would be able to do that.

Richie already made him feel like he could do anything, though.

He knew that he was falling too fast because Richie was the first guy he had actually been interested in. All he had to do was hide how far gone he was until Richie caught up. That should be easy enough.

Or, so he thought, but as soon as Richie snuck him up to his little corner of the community center, Eddie was pushing him down onto his sleeping bag and crawling into his lap.

"Whoa, Eds," Richie said, placing a hand on Eddie's chest. "Slow down there."

Oh fuck. He had fucked everything up. He had never moved so fast. He scrambled off of Richie and backed up against the railing as he tried to keep his breathing even. God, of course he would go and fuck everything up.

"Oh. I'm sorry. I just thought..."

"Hey, Eds. Breathe for me." Richie came over and sat close to him but didn't touch him. "Try to match my breathing, okay? Do you need your inhaler?"

"Uh, no. I think I'm okay. I'm just... embarrassed."

"God, baby, don't be embarrassed. I would *love* to make out with you, but I don't want that to be the *only* thing we do. I thought we could maybe sneak down to the kitchen, grab some drinks, and play a game. And *then* we could make out."

Eddie laughed softly at that. He tentatively reached over and Richie met him halfway, grabbing his hand in his.

"I like it when you call me baby," he said, and Richie's smile could have blinded him. "But don't you dare say it front of the others."

"Cross my heart and hope to die. So, how 'bout that booze?"

"Sounds like the perfect date."

Richie, still holding Eddie's hand, led him down to the office. He did have to finally let it go when he went to the desk and started looking for the keys to the kitchen. He had just found them, holding them up with a triumphant smile on his face, when the lights in the main room were turned on and Eddie heard a crash. He looked up and gasped when he realized the room was full of Virtue members and people they must have tied up. He stood there, staring in horror, and would have been seen if Richie hadn't grabbed his arm and pulled him down.

"Rich, we have to do something."

"What are we supposed to do? There's like a dozen of them, and two of us. Plus, I'm not very good at fighting."

"Then we'll call the police."

"And bring them to the community center where we've killed several people?"

"We only killed one of them," Eddie said with a huff. "Gary wasn't our fault."

Richie laughed nervously.

"I just can't trust the cops, baby. If we don't get caught, we can figure out a way to get them one at a time, right?"

Eddie hated to admit it, but Richie did have a point there.

And so they were forced to watch as the Virtue leader brain washed all those people. Including Bev and Stan. Eddie felt so guilty that they had lost track of time and hadn't been there for their friends, but if Richie wasn't good at fighting and Eddie had only won the fight that had landed him in community service, they probably would just be there with them. Leaving Ben on his own to stop Virtue. He honestly was the best out of them when it came to coming up with plans, but to execute it by himself was asking far too much.

Richie was right.

They had to make it through the night, meet up with Ben in the morning, and figure out what to do.

"There's no way you can stay here tonight," Eddie said. "We have to get out of here and sneak you into my place."

"Oh, Eddie, ready to introduce me to your mom already?" Richie asked, pretending to swoon. "I'm so honored."

"In your dreams. If we're lucky, you're never going to meet her," Eddie mumbled. "Now come on, dipshit. We have to get out of here before we get caught. We get caught, that ruins everything."

"Aye aye captain," Richie said with a salute.

Of course despite everything terrifying that was happening, Richie could still be his goofy self.

God, Richie felt like his heart was going to beat out of his chest. First it was finding Virtue at the community center and then seeing that they had got to Bev and Stan and then Eddie was sneaking him into his bedroom. He wished that he could just be your typical guy, see Eddie's bed where not too long ago they had been touching each other, and just get horny instead. But no, he felt like he was going to die. He had to keep it together, though. Eddie was the one who worried about everything, and if they were both freaking out, he had a feeling that they weren't going to be able to save their friends.

So Richie held Eddie close that night, running his fingers through his hair, and whispering 'It's gonna be alright' until Eddie fell asleep.

The morning was a flurry of running around. Richie was shoved into the closet when Eddie's mother came to say goodbye as she was leaving for work, and then they had to hurry and get ready for community service. Not like they were planning on doing any work, but Richie supposed if they were going to be kidnapped by a brain washing cult, he was going to dress as fun as he possibly could before they forced him into a wool cardigan. Then they were speed walking to the community center so they could intercept Ben before he went inside and possibly was snatched up by Virtue.

Which worked out perfectly, although he kicked Richie in the shin a few times when they jumped on him. Thankfully they got him into the store room without him alerting the entire neighborhood.

"What are you guys doing?" he asked.

"There's a good reason, I swear," Richie said, and then he and Eddie explained what they had seen the night before.

"If she can just say something to brain wash everyone, we're going to need to drown her out so she doesn't get us," Ben said. "You both have headphones you can use?"

"Oh yeah," Eddie said. "That's a fantastic idea."

"Alright, so we blast some music, and try to get the losers away from Virtue," Richie said. "Easy enough, right?"

Of course the three of them knew it was going to be more difficult than that, but they didn't mention it as they got out their headphones and queued up some music. Ben and Eddie were ready, but Richie was still scrolling through his music.

What to put on?

"What are you doing?" Eddie asked.

"You gotta have the right track for this kind of thing," Richie explained. "You need something up tempo, with a bit of edge to it. I'm thinking maybe Jay-Z. Or Dizzy."

"Oh, could you pick something already?"

"Oh yes. That's the one."

Richie clicked on the song, the bass of The Prodigy pumping through his headphones, and gave Eddie a quick nod. Eddie rolled his eyes, the sound of Lady Gaga quietly coming from his headphones. Of course, it wasn't that quiet if Richie could hear it over his own music. If they didn't permanently damage their hearing during this, they would be lucky. With a deep breath, Richie took the first step, and then Eddie and Ben followed.

They made it down the hallway from the store room, through the main room, and then halfway down the other hallway before they ran across one of the losers. It was Bev that Richie saw, and she was heading into the records room. She was dressed in the same drab colors of everyone in Virtue, and it made her red hair look even brighter, so it would have been impossible to miss her. Scared to take their headphones out at any point, they had agreed earlier to rely on hand motions to communicate. Richie got the other two's attention and motioned for Eddie to follow while he and Ben would stand watch.

Eddie slid in the door and closed it quietly behind him. Well,

hopefully it was quiet. At least, it looked like he hadn't slammed. The last thing they needed was for the rest of Virtue to be alerted to what they were doing. Unfortunately, whether it was because they *had* made noise or it just happened that way, Stan walked by and froze when he saw Richie and Ben just standing there. He said something, but of course, Richie couldn't hear him at all.

"I'm so sorry, man," he said, hopefully at a normal enough volume. "I just shit my guts out."

He tilted his head, looking completely confused. Ben then said something to him as well, but it didn't seem to appease him. Richie had to really sell this.

"I'm going to head to the pharmacy. I'll catch you later, Stan the man."

Richie leaned over and patted Stan's shoulder and then headed toward the exit. What else was he going to do? If he kept standing there, they'd definitely be found out then. He had his fingers crossed that Ben had come up with a better way to distract Stan, but when Richie turned around, Ben was standing behind him.

"Jesus Christ," he cried out as he jumped.

He could tell that Ben said 'what' by reading his lips, and he shook his head as if to say 'forget about it.' He grabbed Ben's arm and led him around the building to the window for the records room. Having been living in the community center for a couple weeks at that point, he felt as if he knew the building like the back of his hand, so it was easy enough to know which window led where. He stood up on his tip toes, trying to see into the room. All he was able to make out was lots of movement. That couldn't be good.

"Eddie!" he cried out, as he tried to throw the window open. "Eddie!"

It looked as if someone was pulling Eddie off of Bev, so he was already out numbered. Richie tried the window a few more times, but it must have been locked. He turned around, ready to run back inside, but he was met with practically a Virtue army closing in on him and Ben. Ben was yelling something, trying to pull Richie away,

but Richie stood his ground.

"We have to get him. We can't leave him here!"

But no matter how much he wanted to save Eddie, he knew that if they stayed there any longer, they would be no good to anyone. He stopped struggling and felt as Ben led them toward the river. They stopped to catch their breath for a moment, Richie squatting with his hands braced on his thighs. It felt like his lungs were on fire. Maybe Eddie was right. Living off of chips and Snickers bars may have been catching up to him. Suddenly, Ben was grabbing his arm once more, and Richie saw that Virtue had found them again. They ran toward the highway, ending up under the overpass, and Richie felt like he was out of breath once more.

But it wasn't because of the running.

They weren't close to where they had buried the probation workers's bodies, but that was still all he could think of.

And he froze.

He tried to force his legs to move, but he just couldn't. Virtue was closing in, literally, and he and Ben ended up back to back as they were surrounded by all sides. He and Ben circled around, looking for a way to escape, although it was clear they were fucked. Richie felt Ben's head fall back, knocking against his, and he started shaking.

"What the fuck," he whispered, and by the time he looked back, Ben was gone. Well, not gone. He was invisible. "What the fuck, dude. You can't just leave me here, you dick!"

Richie reached out, trying to find Ben, but it was no use. He must have ran away as soon as he was invisible, which Richie couldn't blame him. If that had been his power, it's exactly what he would have done. In the moment, however, he totally could blame him. What a fucking asshole move.

Well, it looked like he was going to have fight after all. Obviously it wasn't going to do much good except maybe give a few of them a black eye before they dragged him back to the community center and

brain washed him. He was terrified. He didn't want to think about not being himself anymore, but he couldn't go down without a fight. He owed it to Eddie. He should have listened to him the night before. He held his fits up in front of him, sure his stance screamed that he had never been in a fight before in his life.

They were getting close. Richie took a deep breath, and thought about how wished he could have kissed Eddie one last time.

And then someone on a bike burst through the crowd, skidding to a stop in front of him. He motioned for Richie to hop onto the back of his bike, and Richie hesitated. The man was dressed head to toe in black, the black hood of his sweatshirt covering his face. Was it even a man? Richie couldn't tell anything about the person. His instinct told him that someone like that wasn't to be trusted, but it was either him or Virtue, so there really wasn't a choice. He hoped onto the spokes, holding onto the man's shoulders, and then they were speeding off.

Overcome with adrenaline, Richie started cheering, turning around so he could flip off the Virtue members. God, he had thought his goose was cooked, but he as the crowd got smaller and smaller, he let himself breath out a sigh of relief.

Eventually, the man skidded to a stop once more, Richie falling off the bike. He wasn't sure if he should yell at him for the abrupt dismount or thank him for his life first, but he didn't have a chance to do either. As soon as he had appeared, the man was gone.

"Well, fuck me, I guess," Richie muttered to himself.

He pushed himself up and brushed off his jeans, a million things running through his mind. Like, now what to do? He was only one person. There was no way he could take on Virtue by himself. Except, he might not be all alone. He didn't know for sure that Virtue got Eddie. He had to get to Eddie's house and see if he was alright. It took him awhile to make his way back to that part of the neighborhood. He didn't think he'd ever even been in the area where the mysterious man had dropped him off. It was already dark when he finally knocked on Eddie's door, and he was worried that his mother was going to answer. He could have cried when it was Eddie

who opened the door.

But then he saw what he was wearing.

Instead of the bright, vibrant colors of the polo and shorts he normally favored, Eddie was wearing a pair of khakis and a grey sweater. His hair was neatly slicked back, and God, even his face seemed to be drab. He didn't even smile when he let Richie into the house.

"Oh no, look at what you're wearing," Richie said, defeated.

"What do you mean?" Eddie asked. He walked over to a mirror hanging in the hallway, smoothing out his sweater as he inspected his outfit. "I think I look nice."

"I mean, sure, I guess you can argue you look nice. More respectable. Whatever the fuck that means. But it's not you. You're all the colors of the rainbow. You're loud and proud and in your face. You're everything I wish I could be, and you are going to help me get there some day, right? And then we can be ourselves together, and it's going to be beautiful. Right, Eddie?"

"Look at you. You're still so scared," Eddie said. He sounded like a parent, disappointed in a failing grade. "You're scared of being yourself, and it's been holding you back. You put on this front, and all it does is drive people away. You had no real friends. Your parents kicked you out. You're a loser."

Richie wanted to cry. He wanted to argue there was nothing wrong with being a loser. That they had taken 'loser' and made it theirs. But he knew that it wasn't Eddie saying these things. This wasn't him.

"I shouldn't have left you there," Richie said quietly. "I never should have left you there. I'm so sorry."

He walked over to Eddie and placed a chaste kiss on his lips.

"That was really inappropriate," Eddie said, and Richie felt his heart break into a million pieces.

The next few hours passed in a blur. Somehow, Richie had made it to the community center, packed up all of his belongings, and shuffled to the train station. He had a decent amount of money saved up, since he had been eating so poorly, so he easily bought a ticket for the farthest away place he could think of. He sat down on the bench after his purchase and started to wait. Of course his train wasn't arriving for another hour, so there was far too much time for him to second guess himself. He had tucked the photograph of Ron and his partner into the pocket of his jean jacket, and it felt as if it was burning a hole through the material. He pulled it out and smiled down at them.

He had promised Ron he would be brave. He had promised Eddie that he would be the boyfriend he deserved. He should have protected his friends.

Instead he had run away at the first sign of trouble. Well, maybe like the third sign of trouble, but that still wasn't good enough.

The train pulled into the station, and the conductor gave Richie a look when he didn't move from his seat. He watched as the train left without him, and then he started putting his plan together. He practically ran back to the community center and snuck into store room so he could change. He almost gagged a few times. There was a smell coming from one of the freezers, and he honestly was too scared to see what it was that Virtue was up to. That was something he could worry about once he had the rest of the losers behind him. He struggled a bit with the tie, but soon enough, he was dressed in his Sunday best (or, more like, his Sunday only considering he had only ever owned one suit) and making his way into the main room.

The entire place had been taken over by Virtue. Where there previously had been a few boxes of flyers, there were now at least a hundred. Really lame, relaxing music played on a radio as the members went about their work. Some were manning a hot line that had been set up underneath the balcony where Richie had been sleeping. Others were bringing in more boxes while the rest were sifting through those flyers. Richie really didn't understand why they were so obsessed with them since they were just taking people and

brain washing them, but he supposed they had to do something else with their days since they couldn't snatch people out in broad daylight.

'Don't worry,' he thought. 'I'm going to save you from this monotonous work soon enough.'

He was drawn out of his thoughts by Mike stopping in front of him, smiling wide as he greeted him.

"I'm so glad you joined us," he said.

"Oh, yeah. I was such a loser. Hiding who I was, not finding a place to live, all that fast food."

"Yeah, you were such an annoying dick."

It took everything in Richie to not bite back at that. As it was, he was concerned his eye twitching was going to give him away. Quick. He had to divert Mike's attention.

"What's this?" Richie asked, motioning toward the clipboard he was holding.

"Oh, it's a petition to get school's to stop handing out contraceptives. Would you like to sign?"

"Absolutely." Richie took the clipboard and signed the dumbest fake name he could think of, but his handwriting was awful enough no one would be the wiser. "There's only one thing young ladies should be inserting in themselves... and that's knowledge."

Mike's smile faltered for a moment, but Richie didn't have time to worry about that. He saw the leader walking toward the office, so he excused himself, put his headphones in, put Low Rider by War on blast, and pulled out the gun he had hidden in his pocket. He was able to slip into the office right after her, closing the door behind him. At the sound of the door closing later than it should have, she turned around, immediately throwing her hands up when she saw Richie's gun.

"Turn them back," Richie said.

She started talking, going a mile a minute, and she looked terrified. She didn't look as if she was doing anything to turn everyone back to normal, though. She looked like she was making excuses.

"I can't hear you," Richie said, pointing to his headphones. "Don't try any funny business. Just turn them back to normal."

Suddenly, the door hit Richie in the back as someone else entered the office. Richie turned around, and froze when he saw Eddie there.

"Eddie, baby, please don't do anything."

Of course, it was useless. This wasn't *his* Eddie. He ran out into the main room, screaming loud enough that even Richie heard him over the music. Well, there wasn't much else he could do. He grabbed the woman and pointed the gun at her head.

"Don't come near us," he warned, as he led her toward the balcony. He knew there was a door up there that would take them to the roof. He was sure no one would follow them up there. "Don't come near, or I *will* blow her brains out."

That was enough to have everyone step back, and Richie was able to get her up on the roof without a problem. Of course, the rest of the Virtue members had rushed outside so they could watch what he was doing. It had started to rain, really a slight drizzle, since that morning and the roof was very slick. Richie edged close to the edge, still holding onto their leader, and glanced down. Well, it wasn't that far of a drop, but yeah. Best to stay away from there. He could see all the losers down there except for Ben, and he hoped that unlike himself, that bastard had gotten out of there. Richie would be so mad if all of them were stuck as Puritan pieces of shit for the rest of their lives.

He wasn't quite ready to call it quits, yet, however. It was time to do what he did best --

-- talk.

"She has you thinking that this is how you're supposed to be," he yelled down to the crowd gathered around the community center. He hoped he was loud enough that they could hear, but his music was

still playing. It had transitioned from War to Weezer, which unfortunately was not the kind of bad ass soundtrack he'd been going for. "Well, it's not! We're young! We're supposed to drink too much. We're supposed to have bad attitudes and fuck each other's brains out. We are destined to party!" The Virtue members were staring at him like he was absolutely crazy, and he couldn't blame them. He didn't even know what he was talking about at this point. "So a few of us will overdose or go crazy. But Charles Darwin said, 'you can't make an omlette without breaking a few eggs.' And that's what we're doing... breaking eggs! And by breaking eggs, I mean, getting shitfaced on vodka in a Gatorade bottle at school or work. If you could just see yourselves. It breaks my heart. You're wearing *cardigans*. We had it all! We fucked up bigger... and *better* than any generation that came before us. We were so beautiful! We're screw ups." He gestured then between himself and the crowd with his gun. "I'm a screw up. And I plan to be a screw up until my late 20s, maybe even my early 30s. And I will fuck my own mother before I let her or anyone else take that away from me!"

The Virtue leader painfully poked his shoulder. When Richie turned to her, she pointed to his gun as she said something.

"I can't hear you," Richie reminded her, pointing in turn to his headphones.

He *did* look at the gun, though, and noticed that water was leaking out of it. Well, guess the jig was up. Like he had time to find a real gun and had used a water pistol that he had bought at a dollar store.

She was still ranting at him, and honestly, Richie was too tired. He didn't care anymore. He reached out and slapped her across the face. She stared at him, mouth wide open, before lunging forward and punching him right in the jaw. They tussled for a moment, getting closer to the edge once more, and even before he slipped, Richie just *knew* that they were going to go over. He still tried to reach out for something to grab onto as he started to fall, despite knowing it was hopeless.

And yet, he found himself holding onto someone's hand.

Ben.

"Save me Ben," he yelled out, but Ben was too late.

The last thing Richie thought before he landed was, he hoped that with the Virtue bitch dead, Eddie would turn back into his adorable self.

Eddie felt as if he was an outside observer, watching his life as if it were up on a big screen. He refused to believe that any of it had happened. The last thing he remembered before he'd been brain washed was Lady Gaga playing as he screamed for Richie. Mike was so strong, and there was no way he was going to be able to escape his grasp. Then, the next thing he sees is Mike and Bill in front of him, still in their boring clothes, but looking more like themselves again. The losers were all confused, asking each other if they were alright. It seemed that they had all broken free from Virtue's spell. Eddie was so close to celebrating, and then that was when he noticed Richie's body.

His body.

Richie was impaled on the fence that went around the community center. It had gone right through his chest, blood still flowing down his sides and onto the sidewalk. Next to the pool of his blood laid the body of the Virtue leader. Her legs were twisted in such an unnatural manner that it made Eddie sick to his stomach. But it was Richie that he was worried about, of course. He ran over, already crying as he took Richie's face in his hands.

"No, Richie," he sobbed. "Richie, come on. Wake up." He turned to Bill, grabbing the lapels of his jacket and started shaking him. "Rewind time! Stop this from happening!" he demanded.

"I can't," Bill said. He looked so hopeless. "I can't. I'm sorry. I still can't control it.

"No, you gotta do it. You gotta save him. He's not allowed to die."

Eddie threw himself onto Richie's body, crying so hard that he couldn't even see Richie's face in front of him, and the rest of the

losers had to pry him off of Richie.

And then it all blurred together. Ambulances and police came. He had to talk to so many people before he was able to go home, only to have his mother immediately ambush him, yelling about how worried she'd been the past few days. She couldn't lock him away, thanks to community service, but of course that was the last thing that Eddie wanted to do. He was like a zombie, going through the motions, until it was the day of Richie's funeral. All the losers went, and they were the only people there besides Richie's family. It was absolutely depressing, and Eddie was so angry. He thought that it was supposed to offer him closure, but no. He was just angry. He tried to hide it as he approached Richie's coffin, because he couldn't let Richie see him like that, and he gently placed Richie's iPod into his hand. It was so cold, and Eddie turned into Bev's arms.

Then Bill was suggesting they go for a drink in Richie's memory, which was the stupidest fucking idea, but Eddie knew it was the kind of thing that Richie would want. He wouldn't want Eddie to spend his whole life mourning, but that's exactly what it felt like was going to happen. Eddie made it through a few sips of his cocktail before he was excusing himself.

Ben chased him down, though, before he made it a block from the bar.

"Eddie, I'm so sorry," he said. "I tried to... I tried to save him."

And then he handed a CD to him before heading back to the bar.

Eddie crawled into bed as soon as he got home, putting the CD into his laptop and playing the video. Since that first day, when Ben had filmed the storm, he had taken to filming their community service. He had posted a few videos on his blog, which he had told the losers about, but apparently he had captured far more footage than he had let on. Eddie watched as Richie laughed, danced, tried to find his damn power, *lived* on the screen. Eddie cried through the whole thing, but it wasn't the kind of crying he had been doing the last week. He was almost happy, hearing Richie's voice again.

For a moment, he could trick himself into thinking it was enough.

Richie drew in a deep breath, and it absolutely hurt. He tried to sit up, but his head knocked up against something, sending him falling back down.

Holy shit. It was a coffin. He was in a coffin.

Fuck, that was right. He had fallen off of the roof of the community center.

He had *died*.

"I'm alive," he said, disbelieving. "I'm alive! That's it! I've got a power. I fucking knew it! I've got a power." He started laughing, almost hysterically. "Who's laughing now?"

Then it really dawned on him. He was stuck in this fucking coffin. He started banging on the lid of the coffin, as if anyone was going to hear him through the layers of dirt.

"Help!" he called out. "Help! I'm alive! You buried me alive you dicks! Help!"

He was breathing heavily at that point, and it still hurt after not having used his lungs for who knows how long. He noticed that his iPod had been put in the coffin, so he picked it up and started unraveling the headphones.

"I'm immortal," he said, as he selected a song. "That's just great. Thank you! Thanks a lot."

Pressing play, he laid back further into the frankly uncomfortable pillow and buckled down for a long wait.

"Un-fucking-believable."